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ABSTRACT

This sourcebook presents results of a recent case study of how principals are selected in American public school districts. Part 1 (chapters 1-3) describes and evaluates conventional selection practices in 10 randomly supplied school districts according to a five-step process: vacancy announcememts, selection criteria, applicant pools, screening, and employment decisions. These procedures as currently practiced do not do justice to the importance of the principalship, nor do they manifest any consistent likelihood of attracting or selecting the best qualified candidates. Chapter 3, "Pathways to the Principalship," provides case histories of five principals of varying competence, in order to illustrate the vagaries of the selection process from the applicants' perspective. Part 2 (chapters 4 and 5) describes three promising alternative procedures currently in use at five school districts: (1) assessment centers; (2) district operated internships; and (3) "exemplary" common practices. A comparative analysis follows, delineating the difference between the conventional practices described in part 1 and these alternatives. The essential advantages of the latter derive from sequential screening, which provides more objective, reliable, and comprehensive data for assessing applicants, so that appointments are based more on merit than on contingencies. The result is greater credibility for the selection process and a corresponding enhancement in prestige for the principal. Guidelines are included for developing or revising a principal selection procedure. (TE)

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Selecting American School Principals:

A SOURCEBOOK FOR EDUCATORS

D. Catherine Baltzell
PROJECT DIRECTOR

Robert A. Dentler
SENIOR SOCIOLOGIST

January 31, 1983

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Abt Associates Inc.
Prepared for the
National Institute of Education

SELECTING AMERICAN SCHOOL PRINCIPALS:

A Sourcebook for Educators

D. Catherine Baltzell
Project Director

Robert A. Dentler
Senior Sociologist

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Next, several educational organizations also played key roles. The National Association of Secondary School Principals made it possible for us to study their Assessment Center as one of our alternatives to common practice. Similarly, the Florida Council on Educational Management provided essential assistance in identifying and securing the cooperation of two of our other alternative districts. The Committee on Evaluation and Information Systems (CEIS) of the Council of Chief State School Officers also provided helpful commentary. We wish to extend particular thanks to Dr. George Malo of Tennessee, who served as our CEIS coordinator and provided many useful suggestions, particularly concerning our sampling of alternative practices.

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Part I: The Problem of Principal Selection

Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

This *Sourcebook* presents the results of a recent study of how principals get selected for the job in two samples of American public school districts. Almost since schooling began in America, the principal has been seen as a figure of central importance to the learning process. In recent years, the importance of the principal has increased as the role demands of the position have become ever more complex and the pressures on public education ever more intense.

Yet, remarkably little is known about just how these critical educational leaders are chosen. That this question will burgeon in importance over the next two decades is assured by myriad cross-pressures. First, the role of the principal is becoming increasingly complex as school boards, parents, teachers, students, and other administrators make sometimes conflicting demands on the 'man in the middle'—the principal. Second, pressures for equity, for increases in opportunities for women and minority educators, have taken firm root and will continue to be felt. Third, nearly half of the nation's currently employed school principals are now between the age of 55 and 65, and will retire in the next two decades (Pharis and Zachariya, 1979; Byrne, 1978).

At the same time, the effects of cutbacks are being felt everywhere, and there are fewer positions available. This gives rise to the very real possibility that younger candidates—who may be better prepared for the demands of the modern principalship—may be passed over in favor of those with greater seniority (who will likely retire in a few years). This may in turn lead to significant discouragement and even withdrawal of this younger group, to the certain detriment of the future cadre of educational leaders, if not the present.

In response to increasing concerns about the selection of principals and in recognition of the great gaps in the knowledge base, the National Institute of Education (NIE) has underwritten this study as part of its larger research initiative on the principalship. This investigation of how school principals are selected is the first national effort to inquire into the means by which school districts actually choose school leaders.

The study has been designed and executed in two phases. Phase 1 focused on describing and characterizing common practices in principal selection. Using a case-study approach,

field research teams closely investigated selection practices in ten randomly sampled, geographically diverse school districts with enrollments of 10,000 or more students. Phase 2 led directly from the findings of Phase 1, and focused on describing and characterizing promising alternatives to common practices. Through a nomination process, five districts were selected to represent three types of alternatives: (1) assessment centers; (2) district-operated internships; and (3) especially sound or 'exemplary' common practices. Field research work and analyses for Phase 2 were roughly identical to the methods used in Phase 1.

The remainder of this *Sourcebook* presents the results of our investigations. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on findings from Phase 1; Chapter 4, on those for Phase 2. Finally, Chapter 5 offers conclusions and implications drawn from the total study. Additional reports and documents from this study are listed at the close of this *Sourcebook*.

Chapter 2

COMMON PRACTICES IN SELECTING PRINCIPALS

The Issues

While we bent every effort in this study to obtain and develop a kind of natural history of the principal selection process, we also organized our inquiry in a way that would address a few of the most critical issues surrounding that process. The most critical issue of all was whether those who do the selecting do so on the basis of *merit*. We did not approach this issue evaluatively. That is to say, we did not develop independent criteria for assessing merit and then sample candidates so as to compare those selected with those not selected, nor did we find a single study or a single education agency where such an evaluative test had ever been undertaken. We treated it instead from the perspective of what participants in the process within local communities say about their participation. What do they say, if anything, about merit? How do they explain the way they go about seeking it, if they say they do? Do they believe that some candidates have the ability to increase the educational effectiveness of some schools? We wanted to learn whether ideas about merit and merit-based principal selection varied greatly across the communities we sampled or whether variation was small because these are universal standards that pervade school systems. Above all, we avoided imposing on our respondents some set of external standards on the chance that meanings attached to the ideas of merit not only vary in substance but in extent of pertinence to the selection process. Some of the related issues include the following: Who participates in selection? What difference for merit does it seem to make whether participation extends to teachers, parents, civic leaders, and even students? Do selectors search for generic leadership abilities or do they try to achieve a fit between a particular school and the styles of candidates? If it is the latter, what happens when a policy of rotation of principals is introduced?

Our second major issue was the distributive *equity* features of the principal selection process. By equity, we meant the extent to which school systems concern themselves with equalizing access and chances for selection to women and ethnic minorities. Are equity considerations built into the procedures? If so, do these have observable consequences for who gets appointed? Is the process equitable except when other goals have greater priority? What trade-offs are made as selectors cope with balancing a series of contradictory goals? Does the relative presence or absence of equity concerns seem to respondents to

have a real bearing on the legitimacy, authority, and performance of the principalship? As with the issue of merit, we expected to find that equity would be defined in diverse ways, just as it would be acted upon under some conditions but not others. We did not take an evaluative approach based on some external standard but rather concentrated on learning the meaning and place afforded this concern across responding school systems. Similarly, we aimed at learning how system participants reconciled the two concerns, or if they tried to do so.

A third issue was one we came to call the issue of *legitimacy*, not because that word was ever used but because our very first site visit disclosed the importance which attaches to this concern. As we used legitimacy, it referred to the extent to which respondents believed their systems followed procedures that were openly described, fitted to local customs and norms, authentic rather than phony or indifferently implemented, and which result in credible selections.

Finally, we have tried to obtain evidence on the questions of system *efficiency*. Is principal selection subordinated to efficiency? What happens where selectors give primacy to their activities? In other words, is the pathway to the principalship a matter to which great importance is attached as a result of presumed effects upon learners? Or, is there a rhetoric about importance but a body of evidence inside districts which enables selectors to embrace the rhetoric while coping with what are regarded as more urgent operating concerns? Our approach to this issue has been locality-based rather than national or evaluative. As in all parts of our study, we have searched for the meanings that *local* selectors and others involved in the welfare of the system ascribe to their actions.

In developing a descriptive account, we have tried to answer as an organizing theme the question of how one 'becomes a principal' in the districts under study. The following sections of this chapter present our findings organized around our basic five-point model of the steps in principal selection: (1) vacancy definition and announcement; (2) specification of selection criteria; (3) generation of the applicant pool; (4) screening of candidates; and (5) the employment decision.

The Vacancy

Principal selection begins with the declaration of a *vacancy*. On one level of action, vacancy declaration is a simple point of departure. Vacancies are usually defined by the top administration as openings are created by resignations, retirements, deaths, dismissals, or reassignments. They are advertised fairly promptly in general terms in district newsletters and personnel circulars. The timing of announcements and advertisements usually coincides with the flow of the school year. In the event that a vacancy occurs in mid-year, the position is often filled by a vice principal or head teacher (who may or may not be designated as acting principal) to finish out the year. There is usually some advertising in public media, but the search is typically limited to the local area (the district and perhaps contiguous systems). Search boundaries may extend to include the state and perhaps even contiguous states on special occasions, but are virtually never seriously expanded beyond this.

On another level of action, the vacancy announcement step is illustrative of the superintendent's need and desire for administrative control, which constitutes one of the

two main controlling forces on principal selection (the power of the local culture being the second). For instance, one Phase I district had historically used acting appointments to avoid announcing a vacancy. This allowed those in control to dangle the acting principal on the tenterhooks of a possible permanent appointment and thereby secure an extraordinary measure of personal and political control over these individuals, some of whom served for 20 years as an acting principal. Obviously, it also allowed the district to avoid the public accountability process of actually screening and making a permanent appointment.

Far more typical than this now abandoned extreme is the widespread practice of the *non-specific* vacancy announcement. In almost all of our Phase I districts, the vacancy announcements do not specify the particular schools where there are openings. Rather, the announcements call for applications for principalships in general. Interestingly, the top administration itself may not know until the last moment just which schools are in fact open. For instance, principals at elementary schools A and B retire and a general vacancy is announced. While the applications are coming in, the administration begins to think about the possibility of making some transfers to "solve some administrative problems," or "promote John to a larger school," or "protect Jim because we may have to close his school." The decision-makers may proceed immediately with these plans—unbeknownst to the applicants—or they may wait awhile to see how the applicant pool shapes up. Depending on who applies, what the decision pressures are, and how strong the transfer needs become, the vacancies at schools A and B may topple a line of dominoes. In the end, the actual vacancies may be in schools Y and Z.

In spite of these many extreme uncertainties, the vacancy stage of the procedure tells us a great deal about principalships and about our four general issues of merit, equity, legitimacy, and efficiency. For example, there are unresolved logical contradictions which surround the position. Every board member and parent we interviewed regarded the principalship as highly important in determining the quality of schools, and these same persons either followed the selection process with keen interest or took part in it directly. Superintendents and their top officers shared this attitude and explained that they spend many days year in and year out in the search and choice process. Yet, the announcements are, with few exceptions, very limited in outreach; the specific openings are seldom clearly identified; and the volume of applicants is often rather small compared with the great numbers of educators who have state certificates.

Thus, the vacancy stage does not correspond well with the weights placed on the importance of the principalship. Instead, this stage tends to send a message about a rather lower level middle management or supervisory post, more akin to the head teacher model of the 1920s. Where the announcements are kept local, the message implies that the search will not be extensive; where they are made statewide, it is usually to a newsletter for members of a state school administrators association.

Selection Criteria

By the stage of setting selection criteria, we do not mean what is entailed later on in deciding on how to appraise candidates. We mean instead the stage of setting forth the qualifications required for eligibility as a candidate. These are usually cited in announcements or are available on inquiry to the system's central office.

Without exception, all of our districts require at least a B.A. or B.S. degree, at least three years of classroom teaching experience, and a state certificate as principal. All states require from 6 to 20 hours of college credits in courses in educational administration and some require an M.Ed. or M.A. degree in that field along with a practicum or an internship. Four of our ten districts limited their criteria to state certification, while others added master's degrees or even specific course work in special or bilingual education and in curriculum. *Very few* made a concrete connection, however, between the vacancy and the criteria for eligibility, such as requiring teaching and administrative experience at the grade levels of the vacancy. (Again, this does not mean that extra criteria were not brought in to use later in the selection process.) Even where the vacancy was clearly aligned with a specific school, none of the Phase I districts spelled out criteria pertinent to educational leadership such as experience with program planning, budgeting, plant management, community relations, or staff development and evaluations. These and other criterial concerns are uniformly deferred until a candidate pool has been formed and review begins.

Leadership merit concerns therefore do not get activated at this early stage; equity is expressed, if at all, through a line asserting that the district is an equal opportunity employer or a line stating that applications from women and minority persons are encouraged. The criteria have no observable implications for legitimacy other than to demonstrate that a search has been mounted and that *some* definite state and local standards will be used to form the candidate pool. The practice is efficient in a superficial sense: it takes almost no time and effort to formulate. In a deeper sense, the opportunity to channel applicants through a well defined and narrow gate of eligibility is sacrificed and the burdens of narrowing the flow are shouldered at great expense later on.

For instance, in one district the top decision-makers all spoke with sincere intensity about the *primacy* of "finding the best *educational* leaders." Yet, when pressed, none could specify precisely what basic training or experience requirements this need generated for candidates. Rather, the respondents argued that candidate backgrounds had to be assessed on a "case-by-case" basis to determine exactly what educational leadership meant. By way of illustrating this admittedly circular definitional cycle, they showed us resumes of applicants who had not been invited for a particular screening and those who had, and led us through a comparison. In several cases, the uninvited applicants had exceptionally strong and impressive training, certification, and experience in curriculum and instructional leadership. In comparison, the invited applicants appeared much weaker. The explanations given for not inviting the better qualified candidates to compete ranged from, "We think she may be too high-powered to fit in here" (for an outside candidate), to "We're afraid that she's too specialized in reading and compensatory education" (for an inside candidate). This suggested to us that these leaders were at once avoiding engagement with the knotty problems of operationalizing educational leadership and preserving their flexibility and observably heavy reliance on unstated notions of 'fit' or 'image' (discussed shortly).

In some other Phase I districts, a few top decision-makers expressed much clearer definitions of what educational leadership meant. These respondents spoke of the need for candidates to have very specific skills and behaviors, such as "curriculum training in *X* on the resume," "ability and willingness to develop and/or use a systematic teacher evaluation/-observation system," or "specific plans for upgrading the curriculum and bringing achievement up." Such precision was rare, however, and it was not specified in writing.

This lack of criterial specificity opens the way for widespread reliance on localistic notions of 'fit' or 'image,' which emerged as centrally important in almost every Phase I district. Every district had a deeply held image of a "good" principal or a "top" candidate or "just what we're looking for." However, time and time again, this 'fit' seemed to rest on interpersonal perceptions of a candidate's physical presence, projection of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and methods of operation.

The 'fit' criterion works heavily against out-of-district candidates, minorities, and women. The outsider represents an unknown quantity. One does not know how he will 'fit' or embody the local culture simply because he has not been tested and observed in this milieu. Women and minorities are by definition 'different.' Further, women in particular do not embody deeply held images of what a principal, a leader, is supposed to look or act like.

Most principal selectors tend to fall back on vague notions of fit in part because they have no firmer criteria or test. However, even where there are much sharper and more specific notions of the definite skills and qualities principals should have, 'fit' criteria *still come significantly into play*. Those administrators who articulated their criteria sharply (either in general or for a particular appointment) were still constrained by the local culture's 'image' of what a principal should be. This was true even when they were in the process of appointing a principal who deviated significantly from 'fit' with that image.

In spite of the rhetoric to the contrary, then, educational leadership is generally not a well specified or widely applied criterion for selecting principals. On the one hand, specific educational leadership skills are seldom if ever articulated as part of criterial statements. On the other hand, when professionalism competes with 'image' and 'fit,' the latter seem to be favored unless exceptional circumstances prevail.

Further, selectors know in advance what they are looking for – physical size, grooming, goodness of local fit – but they also know these are not legally acceptable as categories for eligibility. Four of our ten districts provide selectors with a checklist of things they cannot ask candidates about: age, family relations, criminal record, and so forth. Many vital criterial concerns fall into this same category.

Forming the Applicant Pool

These steps typically lead to an applicant pool that is made up of local candidates, most of whom have been aiming at the position for several years. The typical candidate began as a teacher or coach (especially at the high school level) and, through willingness to stay after school, handle discipline and serve on committees, came to the attention of the supervising principal. This principal encouraged the candidate in the direction of the principalship by urging a return to college for administrative certification, providing opportunities for more visible committee work (for example, a district-wide curriculum or textbook committee), and 'talking up' the candidate to other principals and administrators. The candidate assisted actively (but not *too* avidly) in the process of 'becoming known' by taking care to present himself as a future candidate and seeking opportunities to learn and be visible in management roles.

After gaining a *widespread* reputation as a 'comer' through this process, the candidate became an assistant principal or a vice principal, or perhaps a head teacher, department head, or status leader of the faculty, or even a curriculum coordinator or reading/math consultant (within the district). After an appropriate tenure in this sort of position, which the candidate used to become more visible to the top decision-making group and cement his reputation, the candidate began to apply and screen for principalships.

Usually (but not always), the aspirant received some encouragement or signal from his mentors and supporters that it was time to begin applying. Depending on the types of openings available, the candidate may go through two or three screenings before receiving an appointment. For example, if there were several long-term candidates in the queue the first time, the candidate may have been passed over (but not in a discouraging manner). Similarly, all the openings may have been for large or difficult schools, while first principalships are usually for smaller, easier schools. However, if the candidate has successfully negotiated the earlier steps in his grooming process, and does not fail at this last hurdle of applying (and waiting) for a position, appointment is only a matter of waiting.

Women, blacks, and other minorities typically are selected into the applicant pool through these same steps. Affirmative action and federal projects such as Follow Through and Title I have enhanced awareness and provided more opportunities, but the process of becoming a female or minority candidate is much the same.

These steps towards candidacy illustrate the universal principle underlying the selection process in all districts: a vacancy is a pool which always becomes filled with applicants. Board members, parent leaders, and senior administrators assume without exception that a principalship is a desirable and therefore desired position. Many teachers and some principals we interviewed say they no longer share this assumption because so many extra duties and tensions have been loaded into the job of principal and because pay differentials between teachers and principals are no longer that great. In any event, some professionals in every district remain devoted to the task of filling the pool.

There appear to be two important ways of expanding the applicant pool: (1) outside recruitment, and (2) internship programs. Outside recruitment, which is not to be confused with simply advertising vacancies beyond local boundaries, focuses on finding and targeting individuals in other districts who are perceived as highly desirable candidates. If all goes well, the outsider is ultimately brought in. However, it is usually an outsider with a firm inside connection to the network. Outside recruitment is a rare occurrence: no more than 10 percent of the 30 principals we studied in Phase 1 were selected in this fashion. However, some of our Phase 1 districts claimed this method as a significant policy option in at least cases of special need.

Internships, which are more properly characterized as alternatives to common practices (and are treated in Chapter 4), seem to be of two basic types. One is the 'ordinary' type, which is designed to sharpen, codify, and publish the grooming process. This type serves to make visible—and more accessible—the steps to the principalship. As a consequence, it seems to encourage a wider range of people to seek candidacy. A second type of internship is the 'equity' internship, which is designed specifically to increase the number of women and minority candidates. Regardless of whether an internship is of the 'ordinary' type or the 'equity' type, its impact on the principal selection process in general is quite variable. On the one hand, an internship program can serve to alter the selection criteria as well as change the composition of the applicant pool. On the other hand, an internship program

can be limited simply to changing the applicant pool, with little or no impact on the other steps in the process.

As far as we could discover, these procedures for making up the applicant pool lead to three to four candidates per opening who are regarded as serious applicants; that is, those with some real chance at the position. The pools also seem well mixed in terms of race or sex, with one exception—the high school level. Here, the number of women and minorities drops off even at the applicant pool point.

For a single vacancy, the pools in our Phase 1 districts often filled quickly with up to 30 applicants. Even this number is small when we consider that New York State reported several years ago that more than 5,000 certified principals were currently unemployed as such, and when we note that in many states, from Massachusetts to Michigan and Kansas, thousands of teachers have been laid off in each year since 1980. A teacher vacancy in one district in our sample will generate at least 150 applications, for instance. The paradox of the pool stage, then, is that far fewer men and women apply than are qualified and available to do so, and that only a few of those who do apply are pre-defined by senior administrators as 'serious prospects.' For instance, one of the cases we observed had a dozen applicants (ten local, two outsiders) even after the early weeding out done by key administrators. However, according to the district leaders, six of the local applicants were not 'serious' candidates: three were interns interviewing for practice; two were multiply repeating candidates who had "insisted" on being interviewed and one was a second-timer whom the superintendent wanted, in his words, "to look at one more time just to make sure before I tell him he'll never be a principal." The paradox is explained, we believe, by the fact that *most districts operate essentially closed selection procedures for principalships*, not by witting design or even expressed intention, but as a functional outcome of the forces that work upon districts as public agencies. We shall elaborate on this explanation at the close of this chapter.

Leadership merit concerns get expressed at this stage most emphatically through the sponsorship-grooming process which culminates in membership as a serious prospect in the applicant pool (and which should not be confused with political patronage). Board members and other sponsoring network members define merit as they think they see it manifested in younger staff on the job and after hours in the community. Both merit and equity concerns get crystallized in the form of ongoing perceptions of performance and pragmatic tests by mentors of protegees. If there is a general awareness that black administrators are needed, for instance, the white mentors will look for, groom, and begin to advocate for those black aspirants who perform well as 'bridging personalities,' that is, who relate effectively to both whites and blacks. This approach is deemed legitimate, not because it truly compares applicants with other applicants but because it appears to be grounded solidly in the interactions of everyday life within the locality. It is efficient because it cuts through the 'red tape' of credential sifting and moves swiftly toward selection.

Screening

Screening typically involves two or three steps, which increase steadily in importance. First, there is a paper screening of resumes and applications, which is usually conducted

by the personnel office and serves primarily to determine that minimal certification and experience standards have been met.

Next, there is usually a formalized screening interview of the eligible candidates, that is, those who passed the paper screening. This interview is important. A candidate who has come through the grooming as a borderline or weak applicant can become popular through a strong performance in the screening interview. Conversely, a strong candidate can hurt his chances by doing poorly in the interview.

The form of the screening interview is varied. It ranges from individual or team interviews by only the superintendent and his top staff; to team interviews by a specially appointed committee of six or seven members, including parents, teachers, and lower level administrators; to very large, joint committees involving 15 to 20 parents, teachers, principals, vice principals, and area superintendents representing several openings. Generally, however, committee *control* if not actual membership is concentrated in the hands of the top administrators appointed by the superintendent, who take care to guide the committee toward an advisory or feedback role and who sometimes (but not always) determine the choice of individuals who sit on the committee.

Just which groups have a part in the screening through representation on the committee depends on a number of local factors. For instance, one district emphatically excludes parents and teachers from the screening because these groups have been traditionally viewed as "potential trouble," according to one top leader. However, parents and teachers in this district manage to involve themselves in the selection process by petitioning and phoning key administrators and board members. Interestingly, these mechanisms have enabled these groups to significantly influence more than one selection, possibly more so than if they had had membership on the screening committee.

Informants in some other districts which seek to include various constituencies often expressed both positive and negative feelings about the appropriateness and value of such inclusiveness. In contrast, in other districts where participation was almost equally broad-based, the various groups worked together smoothly, and generally expressed acceptance and appreciation of the opportunity to share perspectives. However, in districts where participation in screening was broad, top administrators often expressed some ambiguity about having extended membership in the selection process beyond their own inner circle. A number noted that extension is more time-consuming and logistically difficult. In addition, several pointed out that it can be dangerous to bring the various constituencies together, particularly if local politics are conflictual at the moment. Finally, several commented that broadening participation can be both constraining, for it increases visibility and public accountability, and frustrating, for broadly composed committees sometimes strongly resist the candidates initially preferred by the administration.

On the whole, however, administrators in the more inclusive districts were generally positive, and viewed broader participation as offering two important advantages. First, it gives various constituencies an opportunity to test the candidate. However minimal this test may be, it can be revealing. Second, it is a method of conflict control and management. Better to deal with duly chosen representatives of constituencies than with a mass of constituents. Further, allowing various constituencies to participate in decision-making can be a good way to win their support. As one superintendent said, "It can be really frustrating sometimes when I'm sure about who I want. Then it's a farce that I don't see the point in going through it. But when I don't know, or when I'm not sure, it's really a

help. I've changed my mind several times because of how someone performed in front of that committee."

Interview questions or topics for screening range from carefully constructed, standardized questions that are put to every interviewee by the same committee member each time, to free-wheeling, extemporaneous topics raised by any member of the committee who can get the floor. The substance of the questions is usually quite general, and tends to concentrate on the educational philosophy and attitudes of the candidates. Interviewers use questions not so much to get at the 'right answers,' as to test the interviewee's reflexes in the areas of poise, confidence, self-presentation, and 'fit' with the local image of what a principal should be. Even where the questions themselves are developed with care, there are few criteria for scoring the answers, and in no cases have these been psychometrically composed or evaluated.

Screeners we interviewed expressed great concern about the limitations of the screening interview in terms of its ability to predict success on the job. While the screening interview is universally regarded as an essential part of the process, both participants and decision-makers constantly fret over its fragilities and shortcomings. All of our districts had been disappointed at least once by candidates who interviewed superbly and later performed very poorly on the job. The need to apply some sort of performance test is deeply felt, and is the driving force behind the grooming process inherent in the candidate's rise through the ranks. Whatever the crudities and limitations of this grooming process, it at least seems to provide a district with some sense of actual performance in a variety of situations.

Finally, the screening committees summarize their responses to the candidates for the final decision-maker, the superintendent, by several means. These include individually applied numerical ratings or rankings, consensual agreements about candidates' strengths and weaknesses, and discussions of concerns and reactions. Our Phase I districts were about equally divided in their use of these options, with slightly more making use of numerical ratings and rankings than not. Like the scoring of questions, however, in no case had the numerical ranking and rating systems been psychometrically composed or evaluated.

The last interview belongs to the superintendent. If there are several finalists, he usually personally interviews each. Depending on the situation, the superintendent may genuinely use this interview to help finalize his appointment decision. However, even then, the superintendent usually has some idea of which of the finalists he is most interested in at this last hurdle, and the interview is a means of confirming or disconfirming that impression. In other instances where the superintendent has essentially already made his decision, this last interview may serve as a 'get acquainted' session with a promising candidate, who is being initiated into the selection process. In still other situations where the decision has already been made – perhaps based on larger administrative considerations having little to do with the particular opening in question – the superintendent's interviews with all the finalists may have primarily symbolic value. For instance, it can serve to signal to all that the superintendent at least observes the forms and rituals of the game. It can also serve to soothe and encourage good candidates who, for one reason or another, will not be appointed this time around.

The importance ascribed to group interviews in all our Phase I districts cannot be overstated. This is the step in the procedures which is most universally regarded as *the* test of both merit and legitimacy. With respect to merit, the importance springs from the view

of the interview as an *examination*. The candidate must display to others the ability to 'think on his feet' (as one informant said) and to communicate well orally. These are widely believed to be relevant indicators of leadership ability (though many selectors regard them as insufficient) because leadership is directly associated with the criterion of social perceptions of the visual and oral presentation of self. Where subsequent events disclose the choice was poor, selectors assume that their perceptual discernment was faulty, rather than the criterial process itself.

We do not see how this belief differs in any way from its counterparts in the American traditions of job interviewing for hundreds of key occupations. Indeed, it is in this sense that the screening interview continues to have great symbolic importance for legitimizing appointments. Candidates who are not examined by a formally composed group of diverse but significant interviewers are regarded with suspicion. They did not compete 'in the open' with other candidates. They did not display their competencies.

When we note that in seven out of ten districts the screening takes an average of 30-40 minutes per encounter, that the questions are usually neither spontaneous nor answerable in terms of some independent standard of correctness, and that we could not identify differences in selection preferences as a function of who or how many screening participants there were, we are noting that the actual predictive significance of this step in the process is very slight. According to the many screeners we questioned across ten systems, the interviews in effect block or veto at most one in twenty otherwise expected selections! And, in half of these instances, the candidates get selected on a second or third attempt in a subsequent year.

A functional analysis therefore suggests that the screening process exists and has high visibility and importance, not because it upgrades merit selection, but because it mediates and affirms the appointive authority exercised by the superintendent. Close study of this stage discloses the ways in which superintendents delegate and extend their control over school systems by fielding screeners, by sharing with them through top associates, and by taking their advice – which confirms their preferences 80 percent of the time.

If this analysis is sound, revisions in screenings have a lot to do with adjusting the system to changes in superintendents, but very little to do with upgrading the validity of the selection decisions themselves. So, too, the screening procedures reflect the limits the community places on the exercise of appointive authority by any superintendent. In communities where patronage is widely practiced by some board members and some parent leaders, the superintendent 'presides' over the consensus reached by patrons. The screeners are composed of those who serve these patrons or those who aspire to join the patronage network. In districts which rely heavily and trustingly on their superintendents, the screeners can be dominated politely yet conclusively by his staff aides.

For these reasons, very few school board members take a direct part in screening. They shape the candidate pool instead, or (as became especially clear in Phase 2) the larger policy concerns of the selection process.

The Employment Decision

The employment decision is generally made by the superintendent from among the finalists presented by the screening committee. He is seldom if ever bound by either legalities or policies to make the appointment only from the finalist list sent him by the screeners. In other words, he can, if he chooses, appoint a candidate who is not on the list. However, we found only a single instance where a superintendent had done this. The political, cultural, and symbolic pressures at this stage are much too strong; the costs of ignoring committee recommendations are too high. Generally, superintendents work in various ways to insure that *all* of the finalists recommended are at least minimally acceptable. In the rare event that this does not happen, the superintendent will generally reject the entire list of finalists and instruct the screening committee to start over again.

In making his decision, the superintendent takes into account the reactions of the screening committee, solicits the opinions and recommendations of his top staff, and considers the reactions of the school board (which is the official employing body and must approve his choice). Nevertheless, the superintendent is the chief decision-maker. This is not to say that the superintendent can consistently make appointments in an arbitrary or authoritarian fashion, nor does it mean the board or the community are powerless. (For instance, sometimes a superintendent may informally 'sound out' his board before bringing a particular appointment up for a public vote.) In fact, we saw several cases where the community and/or the board were powerful, direct actors in particular selections, but in a behind-the-scenes fashion.

Superintendents, without exception, put their own reputations on the line when they recommend a candidate to a school board. If they have not investigated the serious candidates before screening, they often do it afterward, narrowing their queries to the top three persons. They may do extra telephoning to supervisors; they may send a trusted staff member out to 'shadow' the candidates on the job; and they may even have legal counsel arrange for checks of personal histories in order to scan for felonious, marital, or financial misconduct. Above all, if they have doubts, they defer decision and make transfers or acting appointments. Where a groomed candidate enjoys the sponsorship of a board member, the superintendent may have to devise ways to rationalize or even cover over gaps in the qualifications of the candidates. This is done as much to protect his own reputation as it is to fulfill the wishes of board members. In addition, the superintendent must condition his choice with considerations of how parents and teachers in the school might react, how board members will respond, court orders (or threats of suits) mandating equity, and other administrative and political concerns that face him at the moment. In sum, his reputation rides on all of the factors and constituencies that come together at the moment of the appointment decision.

Thus, from the superintendent's perspective, each principal employment decision is a thread that he is weaving into the fabric of the entire district. To use another metaphor, each decision is a very important piece on his district gameboard. Hence with each decision, the superintendent is typically trading off among several educational, political, and administrative goals for both the individual school and the district as a whole. The pressures and crosscurrents around the decision to employ are generally complex and can be quite intense. Superintendents in Phase 1 districts were usually quite candid and articulate about the different factors that typically have to be taken into account in any one selection instance. These included: seizing an opportunity to promote staff (assistant principal to principal, small school to larger school); solving administrative problems (giving a

principal in trouble at one school a second chance at another); moving principals about for professional development purposes; protecting seniority in the event of future school closings; showing responsiveness to political pressures from boards and communities; and composing administrative 'teams' (principals, assistants, deans) across several schools.

In other words, the decision to appoint a principal for Smith School is *not* independent of other considerations. The importance of this reality cannot be overstated. The web of connectedness typically reaches to several other schools (and issues) at least, and in the larger sense, is spread across the entire district. Hence, the superintendent's reputation is on the line not just as far as Smith School is concerned, but also insofar as the appointment vibrates and shifts the larger web.

Board approval of the superintendent's decision is routine and predictable for it has been factored into the early stages of the entire selection process. Where there is a belated flare-up of board dissent (or of parent or teacher protest), it is most often a sign of strains in the tenure of the superintendent and is thereby merely one among a series of problematic incidents. In about 28 of the 30 appointments we traced in detail, there was no discussion or reaction or even delay associated with the decision to appoint once it was presented to the board.

Roles of Superintendents and Boards

Who selects school principals? There are a few districts in which the answer would be the board, the senior administrators, teacher representatives and parent leaders. In one of our districts, for instance, a federal judge ordered biracial, multiethnic participation of these groups in screening and rating candidates.

In seven out of ten Phase I districts, however, the selection process is almost wholly determined, and candidate appointment is nearly always dictated, by three sets of players occupying three role positions in each system. If we had a multiple regression model from which to assign weights to sources of influence over choices of principals, we would probably assign .6 of the 1.0 to superintendents, .2 to veteran senior administrators ranging from deputy superintendents to personnel directors to long-term principals, and .2 to some school board members. On a board of seven, for example, two members may attend closely to leadership selection, as tasks and political specialization emerge over time.

The superintendent controls principal selection from the formation of the applicant pool through the appointment. He does so because this is his primary means of system management. The principals are his program implementors. And, he does so because so many other decisions he faces each year—resource allocations, teacher union relations, operating and maintenance, facility planning, student discipline, and parent relations—impinge upon or are carried out through the principals. Finally, he does so, according to those we interviewed, because he was usually a principal for many years himself and he believes he knows how to judge educational leadership as well or better than others in his district. After making some choices over time, moreover, he has loyalties to reciprocate as he rotates some principals and retires others.

Superintendents in larger districts cannot perform this influential role adequately without mobilizing the help of others. Thus, in every district we studied, selection pro-

ceeds through the activities of from two to five senior associates. With the singular exception of personnel officers, this staff cadre is composed with little regard for the formal office held by its members. It is composed rather, of those who share the deepest personal confidence of the superintendent and whose judgment of people he regards as keen in the way he thinks his own is keen. The members of this cadre, whose second echelon always includes a few principals, can exert considerable independent influence. The personnel director, who sometimes is an associate or assistant superintendent, can be of particular importance because he is in full-time command of information about human resources. He can also introduce procedural innovations and rationalize them in terms of trends he hears about at association meetings and workshops. He can also 'keep tabs' on promising aspirants including devising and maintaining personnel records on all employees. In addition, these professionals *fuse* the ability to explain what constitutes modern personnel administration with the ability to facilitate patronage, mentorship, grooming, and 'little departures' from formal standards when the occasion demands. This position is so sensitive that it tends to be filled in one of two somewhat exaggerated ways: Personnel directors are appointed because they are ambitious, discerning, professional 'brokers' (as one defined himself), or because they are earnest, well intentioned, but uninfluential support staff for other top administrators, particularly superintendents. It is the former group from which future superintendents and state agency directors are drawn.

Board members as a committee of the whole or as a majority bloc *do not choose* principals. The 'game' is too intricate to be played by such a group and it takes too much time away from other pursuits. Boards therefore perform two critical functions. First, as a whole or as a policy-setting majority, they define the expectations of the community. Where these have been quite clearly built over the years and seem to a board majority to be what the community wants, or should have, this definitional function remains quiescent. At other junctures where deep change is desired, it leads to a change in superintendents, deputies, and procedures (as became especially apparent in the Phase 2 districts).

Secondly, some board members invest in the personnel selection network, as we have called it earlier. Their peers know them as such. Teachers and parent leaders and mayors know them as well. Where they specialize in this way *in tandem* with the superintendent and a proactive personnel director, these individuals build up a within-staff constituency. In this respect, they provide mutual aid and advocacy for some staff and thus sacrifice their own policy-making independence, in return for increased influence over resource allocation and personnel rewards and punishments. As such, these board members are most often effective defenders of the system's *status quo*. They are neither reformers nor reactionaries. When the system undergoes deep or rapid impacts from others—when it gets caught up in economic or political changes of some magnitude—these board members do not get reelected or reappointed. As they are replaced, the principal selection subsystems then begin to twist and heave with intense waves of uncertainty. The network decays or snaps under the crosswinds of change.

Interpretation and Conclusions from Phase 1

Far from developing skepticism about the importance of the principalship for affecting the quality of teaching and learning outcomes and public confidence, our interviews and

observations in Phase 1 confirmed our sense of this importance at every turn and in every district from coast to coast. For instance, it appears that principals draw their sense of mission in significant degree from their selection experience. Without clearly articulated criteria and reasons for the final employment decision, principals can be left wondering exactly why they were appointed, and subsequently be undercut in their leadership roles, especially in the critical first year or two at the school. Several of our Phase I principals expressed frustration and anger at the lack of information they had received about their own appointment.

In addition, the selection process has powerful and widespread symbolic value. Our Phase I interviews and observations revealed that a principal appointment is perhaps the most visible action a superintendent takes. Many, many individuals and groups observe it very closely, even when they are not directly involved. The way the process is structured and implemented widely communicates the values and operational style of the top leadership, *as well as goals and aims for the district*. If the process is perceived to be fair, accessible, open, and professional—or struggling in this direction—trust and confidence are enhanced. This seems to be the case even where there are disagreements about a particular choice. If, however, the process is perceived to be the opposite, the effect may reverberate negatively throughout the system. For instance, several of the principals we interviewed spoke of feeling discouraged professionally by such selection systems, even after having successfully negotiated them to secure their appointments.

Hence, by concentrating on selection rather than upon performance, we became acutely informed about the ways in which the performance-impact relationship is culturally, politically, and economically constrained. The cultural variations from community to community are so great that it is not possible to construct an abstract or uniform model of the relationship. What board members, community leaders, parents and teachers want as schooling outcomes nowhere coincides with some national policy or logical theory. Locally diverse educational goals tend over time to become knitted into a subculturally coherent set of themes and preferences, which *may or may not* place a high value on the principal as a leader of the instructional program, of teacher supervision and evaluation, and of student achievement. These local themes, however, inform and drive the selection process, unless subcultural changes or community conflicts have destroyed their coherence.

The polity of the district is no longer separated or buffered against the polity of the community as a whole, if it ever was. Therefore, except where court orders intervene, in an era of scarcity, appointments of principals are subject to the influence of the local political marketplace, and in some districts that marketplace extends to include much of the state. A superintendent has a great deal of calculating to do under these circumstances. *Educational leadership merits become but one element in his calculations.* The economic constraints have already been outlined. For the most part, they operate to distort key stages in an equity-oriented, merit-based principal selection procedure, even where the board and superintendent may be striving to create and preserve such a procedure.

The selection process thus attenuates the idealized relation between principals' competencies, abstractly rendered, and enhanced school effectiveness.

However, there are ways of strengthening procedures in order to protect against attenuation. We saw several of these in the first phase of our research, and the second phase of research identified others. The selection process as it actually works in many school

districts departs so profoundly from the idealized model, however, as to lead us to infer that much more must be learned about the cultural, political, and interpersonal functions of the principalship before development efforts can be devised that will in fact result in fitting leadership means to educational ends.

Chapter 3

PATHWAYS TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Introduction

In Chapter 2, we described and characterized common practices in principal selection, sacrificing the more intimate and personalistic experiences of individual principals and candidates. These more individualistic views are important for a number of reasons. First, although candidates are often in the dark about certain features and meanings of the race they are running, their experiences and perceptions reflect the larger process. Second, the individual experiences illuminate and illustrate certain variations on the larger story. For instance, women and men appear often to have somewhat different patterns of personal decision-making in deciding to become a candidate. Third, those who have succeeded in becoming principals have reactions to and beliefs about the experience. These deserve to be reported, not only because they are interesting and worthy of respect in and of themselves, but also because they affect what a candidate thinks about being a principal. How one is chosen for a job, how one perceives and feels about that choice process, affects the way in which the job is carried out.

Therefore, in this chapter, we offer several illustrative stories from our sample of 30 tracked selections (three per district). We have chosen to offer these stories intact—with appropriate commentary about the larger district picture, which is sometimes different from what the candidate believes to be happening—in order to give the flavor of individual participants' experiences. We have selected five stories as representative of the larger themes and dynamics of selection, and as illuminative of some of the variations and finer points of the overarching patterns.

In particular, these individual experiences illuminate a central finding about common practices in principal selection: the process itself *cannot* be characterized as merit-based or equity-centered. As some of our examples show, this is not to say that good candidates never enter the race or that good principals are never chosen. Rather, it is simply that when merit and equity win out, it is frequently due to chance or just the right combination of circumstances at a given moment; to exceptional personal ambition and political skill; or to leadership talent so outstanding that it is universally recognized, and would probably rise to the top in virtually any circumstance. (Pseudonyms have been used for all individuals and schools.)

Jessie Pratt: An 'Election' by Her Peers

Jessie Pratt is a tall black woman who, at the time of our visit, was completing her first year as principal of Lee Elementary, a small, older (but beautifully maintained), suburban school.

Pratt began her career in the district in the early 1960s as a classroom teacher at Jackson Elementary, spending 14 years here. From the beginning, she had some aspirations towards administration, but these were not particularly strong or well thought out. As she said, "When I started in education, I always wanted to try all roles eventually." As a teacher, she became a unit leader at Jackson, which was essentially an elective leadership position. With the encouragement of her principal and her teaching colleagues, she next decided to apply for a position as a district-wide subject-area consultant. As she said: "I tried the consultant role as a first non-teaching experience, to see if I would like it. And, the teachers I worked with [as unit leader] kept encouraging me to apply for it."

Pratt applied for the consultancy by filling out a yearly checklist that is distributed to all staff to ascertain interest in administrative positions. There was no screening, but she did "talk with the curriculum director [of the subject area]." Pratt secured her appointment as consultant beginning the following fall, and was very successful in the position: at the end of her first year, she won a district-wide award as outstanding consultant. Interestingly, Pratt herself did not mention this during our interview; rather, a number of other informants mentioned it with no little pride, for Pratt is generally regarded as an outstanding and talented educator. Pratt is much more modest, however, and genuinely seems to regard her success as due in signficiant part to "all the support I've had—it makes it much easier [to do a good job] to have backing—it really encourages you."

After 18 months as a consultant, Pratt decided to apply for a new opening as assistant principal. This position was the first elementary assistant principalship in the district, and was split between two schools which had each grown large enough to require a half-time assistant principal under state law. As Pratt commented, she had anticipated the opening in part because "other people told me to keep an eye out for this and urged me to apply." When the vacancy was announced in the district newsletter, Pratt applied by calling personnel and expressing interest. Once again, teachers and principals she had worked with were very supportive. Many called to tell her they were very pleased that she had applied, and the Jackson's principal continued with his encouragement.

Pratt interviewed for the assistant principalship in a group interview with the directors of personnel and elementary education and the two principals slated to share the assistant. As she said, "I had no idea who else was screening and I didn't have any sense one way or another when I came out of the interview." Pratt commented that she would have been quite content to stay in her role as consultant, which she evidently enjoyed, had she not been given the position. But, "A week later they called me to take the position."

Once again, by all accounts, Pratt was very successful in the role, winning accolades from her teachers and principals. In fact, one top administrator commented: "Jessie did such a good job that we're thinking of trying to have assistant principals at more of our elementary schools. It can be a really helpful role."

At the end of her first year as assistant, Pratt applied for and secured the position of Teacher in Charge of the Title I Summer School. This was in essence a mini-principalship,

and, Pratt said, "I wanted to see what it was like to be completely in charge of a school." During this summer, Pratt received an announcement of the principalship opening at Lee. (Announcements were mailed to everyone who had indicated interest in the principalship on the annual checklist.)

After considerable thought and urging from her colleagues, Pratt decided to apply for the Lee position. She said: "I got lots of encouragement to apply – namely from the teachers in both schools where I was serving [as an assistant] and from the Jackson principal. I probably wouldn't have applied if it hadn't been for this, because I was very happy as an assistant."

Pratt applied by letter, and she was pre-screened by the top elementary administrator in the district and the superintendent. Then she was interviewed by the Lee parent-teacher screening committee. Pratt characterized this interview as "tough, because there were so many people involved and I was concerned that I might not have brought out all the points I wanted to." However, according to reports of committee members, Pratt once again did well. As one said: "Originally we thought we wanted a man for the role modeling, but Jessie just did so well. We've been very lucky to have her."

The key to Pratt's career path has been her ability to create a "groundswell" of support and mentoring from her peers, colleagues and supervisors. She herself appears to be pleased and honored by this, yet somewhat bemused. She seems to see herself primarily as a committed elementary educator, engaged with curriculum and instructional issues (which pepper her conversation). She is always pleased to discover that she has "so much support," as she puts it, but does not appear to have consciously set about creating it.

Pratt's competence continues to create support for her. At the end of her first year as principal at Lee, she was promoted to the principalship of the much larger Jackson Elementary. (Once again, Pratt did not volunteer this information during our interview, but did discuss it when we brought it up.) This move, which was undertaken as an administrative transfer without screening, brings Pratt full circle, for Jackson is the first school where she spent 14 years as a teacher, and the retiring principal is her long-time mentor. In fact, he was instrumental in securing Pratt as his replacement. While the top administration thinks very highly of her, their initial inclination was to leave her at Lee, for as one key decision-maker said: "She has had only one year as a principal and Jackson is much larger than Lee." However, the decision-makers solicited the recommendation of the retiring Jackson principal, whom they characterized as an outstanding educator, and he urged Pratt's appointment. As one top administrator said: "His opinion was good enough for me."

Pratt herself had no idea that this groundswell was underway until, as she said: "Mr. James [the retiring principal] called me and said he was encouraging and supporting me to become principal. Then the superintendent called and said this might be open and would I be interested. Then I think he made his decision and he called me again and said I was being transferred."

In sum, Jessie Pratt's is a story of merit (and equity) being served by the end result of the process. Yet, the key to this happy circumstance was not so much that the particular principal selection process under which Pratt rose sought out these qualities, as it was that the process was open and flexible enough that these could emerge. Hence, when a groundswell of support and acclaim developed for a particularly outstanding candidate, that per-

son could rise to the top. Without that groundswell, however, the good or even exceptional candidate may remain obscure and unknown. (The present administration of the district is undertaking reforms to strengthen the process so that, in the words of one new leader, "more good people can be identified and developed.")

Jim Brandon: Getting the Consolation Prize

Jim Brandon is a white man of medium stature, who was completing his second year as principal of Linden Middle School at the time of our visit. Linden is a large, brand new, high status, suburban middle school, serving the upper socio-economic strata of the district.

Brandon began his career as a high school teacher and remained in the classroom for 18 years, at which time he decided to apply for an assistant principalship. Brandon's motivation was simple: "I was getting a little bored with teaching and thought administration might be interesting. And, some people downtown [the superintendent and director of personnel, who closely control selection in this district] suggested I might like it too." Brandon received no other encouragement or mentoring than this, however, and complained of often being "left hanging" and "kept in the dark."

Brandon proceeded to apply for an assistant principalship at Whitney High School, and subsequently had a formal interview with the selection committee (the director of personnel and secondary schools) and then the superintendent. He reported that he did not find the interviews particularly challenging, but, at the same time, did not feel any particular confidence that he had secured the position. As he said: "Central office people don't tell you 'til the last minute that you have a position. I didn't find out about Whitney until the board meeting when the board decided. Then my competition told me that he was there 'cause they [the selection committee] wanted to give him exposure to the board, but that I had gotten the position. Then the board voted and I got it." And later, "It doesn't matter who the administration is here in this district, they like to hold their cards 'til the last minute in case they need to play them."

After serving as assistant at Whitney for two years, Brandon made a lateral transfer to an assistant principalship at Linden High School (companion to Linden Middle). He did not have to apply directly for this position. However, Brandon had "put my name on the list of people interested in some principalships that were open at the time." He had done this in response to a call from "downtown" requesting that he put in an "open-ended" application. (This is common practice in this district: on one level, vacancies are advertised openly; on another, serious candidates are tapped and invited to apply by key administrators who have, in the words of one, "had their eye on [them] for some time.")

As a result of this move, the principal at Linden High called Brandon and asked if he would be willing to transfer into an assistant principal opening there. Following this call, Brandon once again went through a screening with the selection committee. And once again, he knew nothing of his fate until Linden's principal told him "to come to the board meeting the night they voted on the move."

Brandon spent three years as Linden High's assistant principal, during which time the school went through considerable upheaval and turmoil. This was reportedly due both to

the principal's personal problems and to differences of "philosophy" between the principal and the community and faculty. Several informants, including Brandon, characterized the situation at Linden as "very unstable" and "chaotic."

After three years, Brandon "expressed interest in one of the several principalships open at the time, including Linden High's." He was subsequently called in for an interview with the superintendent, during which he discussed his interest "in two or three schools, with primary focus on Linden High." At the time, Brandon was not even aware that the Linden Middle principalship was open. During the summer he did discover the middle school opening through the grapevine. He said: "I might have preferred the high school at first but as I found out more about this school I really liked it."

Brandon was subsequently given the middle school principalship, but had no discussions with the administration about his interest in or qualifications for the school. He related that he was told about two weeks before the board voted that he had the middle school appointment. He remains frankly unknowing (and unconcerned) about just how he secured the position. He said: "I don't know what the thinking was at different places in the selection, but it worked out really well for me here. Educationally I don't believe I would've been as happy at the high school. I wasn't aware of all this [high school/middle school differences] at the time, but before I came it looked better and better and since I got here I've been really happy." (Just how Brandon got Linden Middle's principalship is tied to the story of Linden High's principalship, which follows.)

When asked to describe the selection process, Brandon replied quite sincerely: "I would be hard pressed to say just what sort of selection process they really use." He did believe, however, that the final decision was a combination of board influence and the superintendent's desires. He also believes that the selection process has generally improved with the state's Sunshine Law. He noted: "Before, boards would meet behind closed doors and be more active in the process. For instance, a person would go to board members and kind of be sponsored by board members. People were not really discontent or critical of this, they just always took it for granted that this was the way it was done. But they can't meet behind closed doors now—this makes it much harder for them to make these sponsorships."

Since becoming principal of Linden Middle School, Brandon has been pleasantly surprised at how much he likes the position (as noted earlier). He reports that he has found it "a real relief" not to have so much time "taken up with police [discipline] kinds of things and all this night-time sports stuff." He has also discovered new interests in curriculum and instruction, and has embarked on a series of new educational programs and extensive inservice workshops in instructional methods for his faculty.

In sum, Brandon may indeed have found his place at Linden Middle, and his growing revitalization as an educator may indeed benefit the school. Nevertheless, this happy outcome was not conveyed to him as the central goal of the selection process that put him in the job. In fact, as will be seen shortly, it is questionable as to whether this outcome was at all important to that process.

Ralph Hooker: Winning the Support of Parents and Faculty

Ralph Hooker is a tall, white male, who was completing his first year as principal of Linden High School (companion to Linden Middle School) at the time of our visit. Linden is a large, high status, suburban high school serving the upper socio-economic strata of the district. It is sparkling new, and lodged in beautifully landscaped grounds.

Hooker began his career as a senior high teacher, spending eight years in the classroom. For the last two of these years, he transferred to Linden and then decided to move into administration. He is frank and open about his ambition to someday be a superintendent, and sees the principalship as a critical step on this career path. Having made this decision, Hooker went back to school at night to certify in administration, at the same time seeking all the extra duties and service opportunities at Linden High that he could manage. He said: "I let the principal know what I was doing, and then I started helping out in the office and after school as much as I could."

As soon as he was certified, Hooker applied for an open assistant principalship at Linden High. He interviewed with the screening committee and the superintendent, and was called back for a second interview. This is unusual for this district and was undertaken, according to one top administrator, "because we didn't really know Ralph that well—he was relatively new to us." In other words, Hooker was aggressively pursuing administrative positions rather than waiting to be 'noticed,' and this violated common practice. Hooker also commented: "My supervising principal [who was leaving after some conflict] also recommended me and mentioned my name in correct places."

Hooker's *new* principal was an anomoly in the district, for he had been brought in from the outside by the superintendent. In fact, it was his "wild card" (as one informant characterized it) entry that led to Jim Brandon's appointment as principal of Linden Middle School. Brandon was assistant principal at Linden High at the time, and in the words of one key decision-maker, "was next in line for Linden High." However, the superintendent was successful in securing the outsider's appointment, and Brandon was given the principalship of the middle school. At the time of this appointment, this meant that there were two assistant principalships open: Linden High and Linden Middle. Brandon was given his choice of Hooker and another assistant principal candidate, and chose the other because of his junior high experience. Hooker therefore went to Linden High as assistant.

Unfortunately, the new principal at Linden High did not work out. Beset by difficulties, philosophically and stylistically at odds with teachers and parents, he allegedly soon had Linden in greater turmoil and upheaval. The particulars of this conflict are vague: none of our informants could seem to pin them down with any precision. Nonetheless, it was clear that parents and teachers were unhappy. As one central administrator said: "Linden has always been a difficult school to fill because of the parents there. They are very demanding and very active. And the faculty is very entrenched. They've been there 15 or 20 years and have their own way of doing things." Hooker himself commented, "The faculty had talked to me several times about their problems with him. I tried to tell them I thought he was a fine administrator, and I did. I enjoyed working with him. Then I tried to talk with him about how they felt. I felt like this was just the most I could do."

After 18 months as principal, the outsider left, leaving the principalship open. After some debate and jockeying, Hooker was appointed principal. This was an unusual appointment for a number of reasons. First, Hooker is considered too young by the key

decision-makers, all of whom have seen 30-35 years of service in the district. Second, Hooker had only 18 months as assistant principal, and the customary minimum in the district is three to five years. Third, Hooker is perceived with slight suspicion because of his aggressiveness and ambition. Clearly, he does not wait for the customary 'tap on the shoulder' that is expressed so clearly by Jim Brandon's career path.

Several unique factors worked in Hooker's favor. First, the school does have a reputation as being "tough," "hard to manage" because of the parents and teachers, and Hooker was extremely popular with both groups. Both mounted petition and letter drives in support of Hooker, and two board members live in the neighborhood and have children at Linden. As one teacher leader said: "We felt so badly burned by [the outsider] – the school was seriously hurt by him. In this system, teachers usually play no part in principal selection. But it got so bad a large faculty committee went over his head to protest his principalship. When he left, the faculty went so far as to circulate a petition in favor of Hooker. It's not so much that we saw him as a saviour, but we felt he could do the job and we *knew* him." The very powerful parent community shared this perception, and let the administration know it through letters, phone calls, and *en masse* visits to the superintendent. In addition, the two board members were kept closely and frequently apprised of the situation and feelings in the community.

Hooker himself was rather surprised at his appointment, for he did not (and does not now) fully appreciate the weight carried by the parents in the situation. He did screen for the position, interviewing with the selection committee and the superintendent. However, he received no signal from the decision-makers until the day before the board met to vote, when the superintendent called and said he had the appointment. He said: "I didn't know what kind of a chance I had. I fully expected to see it given to someone else. I wasn't sure until the day the superintendent called. Then I assumed it would be an interim appointment because I figured if I had a chance, my best shot would be an interim." The appointment was *not* an interim, but rather was for a full, permanent principalship.

Once again, Hooker may well have been the best choice for Linden. His youth, energy, and aggressiveness appear to be widely appreciated by the parents, many of whom themselves are youthful, energetic, and aggressive professionals. The teachers appear to appreciate his 'hands-off' approach, which they had been accustomed to for all but six of the last thirty years. The school seems to have an atmosphere of busy discipline, and the students appear at least as content to the brief visitor as high school students anywhere. Regardless, however, the selection process that catapulted Hooker into the principalship did not seek out his merits and skills. Rather, he owes his position in large part to serendipity: to the accident of choice that made him assistant at Linden High instead of Linden Middle; to very powerful parents and teachers who wanted stability and a known quantity after six years of unaccustomed turmoil and conflict. As one top administrator said: "They *really* wanted him and there just wasn't much we could do about it."

Mary Caseda: The Special Projects Route

Mary Caseda is a tall Hispanic female, who was completing her third year as principal of Johnson Elementary at the time of our visit. Johnson is a small, urban school, housed in a church annex and basement now owned by the school department.

Caseda majored in elementary education, taking a master's in this specialty, and began her career as a classroom teacher. After teaching for five years, she switched to the new Follow Through program, a federally funded effort to innovate in compensatory instruction, because, she said: "I really believed in what Follow Through was trying to do with the curriculum." After two years as a Follow Through teacher, Caseda was asked by the program director if she would become a staff developer for the growing program and work with Follow Through teachers in several schools to help develop their instructional and curriculum skills. She spent three years in this position, and then was asked by the director if she would take a position as on-site Teacher in Charge at one of the smaller (five teachers) Follow Through annex schools. She noted: "The director told me he wanted someone in authority who understood the model." A few years later, this small Follow Through school had grown large enough (13 teachers) to warrant absorption by the district, and conversion to Johnson Elementary.

When Johnson was created, the principalship was advertised as vacant. With encouragement from the Follow Through director, Caseda signaled her candidacy by submitting a letter of interest and a resume to the superintendent. She never underwent any screening. However, she did initiate an appointment with the superintendent to "discuss the possibility." She characterizes the superintendent as remaining noncommittal throughout the discussion; and she had no other conversation with him. She discovered that she had been appointed principal when she saw her name in the paper as part of the school board agenda. Caseda commented: "It went by so fast I almost missed the promotion."

The keys to Caseda's candidacy and appointment are her deep knowledge of and identification with special instructional programs, particularly Follow Through. In fact, her career path and selection process were *entirely* outside of the normal district selection practices. Universally, our informants characterized these as an almost pure patronage system, based on "your connections and contacts." One informant summed it up neatly: "The superintendent didn't need to interview or screen anybody for principal. He knew everybody. And the school committee never challenged him. If they did, he just wore them down 'til they accepted it."

Follow Through schools—because they were part of federal programs—followed a much more professional selection process. Principals had to have credentials that established their appropriateness. Candidates went through a series of interviews with Follow Through parents, teachers, and program administrators. These deviant selection requirements, plus the general accountability and "special competency" requirements associated with federal programs in general, led the district administrators and other principal candidates to regard Follow Through schools as outside the mainstream. Hence, the Follow Through principalships were of little interest. Caseda expressed it neatly: "These programs have a *very* different philosophy. They are child centered, rather than teacher centered. They have parent involvement—teachers have to meet the parents. At the time, no one wanted Johnson. It has lots of special programs besides just Follow Through and there's a lot to do. And it's so different. When I first started as principal, the other principals rejected me because I'm Follow Through. They wanted Follow Through to go away. I had to prove myself to them."

For Caseda, the Follow Through connection served two essential purposes. First, it kept her isolated from the larger district 'game of the principalship' and provided her with opportunities for advancement that she otherwise simply would not have had. Perhaps even more importantly, however, it helped her see herself in a new way and, with the encour-

agement of her program director, led eventually to her embracing the role of principal. She summarized: "The Follow Through program has made me sharpen my vision of myself. When I graduated from college, I wasn't thinking of being a principal or anything else. This has been a real role switch for me—like a lot of women, I have a lot of family demands and I really wasn't a secure person. Follow Through has been a big growth process for me and my director has constantly pushed me to grow. Without that, without Follow Through, I wouldn't be where I am today. Now, I feel very secure—I'm learning to be a district leader and I'm even thinking about applying for elementary director!"

Ironically, the Follow Through process is now the model that the *new* superintendent intends to put in place for all principal selections. His is a mandate for reform of the abuses of the past, and both he and his newly appointed key administrators have deep ties to federal programs. Regardless of the future, however, the fact remains that while merit (and equity) were well served in the case of Caseda's appointment, the selection is not due to the practices common in the district at the time. Rather, she was appointed because Johnson Elementary was simply not a piece on the larger gameboard.

T.R. Taylor: Coached for Confidence

T.R. Taylor is a white male, completing his second year as principal of Mantle Elementary. Taylor began his career in the district as a secondary classroom teacher. After several years in this role, he was tapped for a vice principalship in one of the district's middle schools. After attaining this position, he made two attempts at a principalship. However, he was continually overlooked, for as several informants commented: "He lacked confidence." Nevertheless, when the principal of Mantle Elementary died unexpectedly and early in the school year, Taylor was deemed appropriate to assume the role of temporary vice principal in charge of the school.

The Mantle vacancy was not announced and screened until the end of the school year, during the summer. Screening interviews were held in June, and a week later Taylor's appointment was announced.

There were two keys to Taylor's success this third time around. First, the superintendent extensively coached Taylor, prepping him to give desired answers to the screening panels' questions. According to one informant: "The purpose of these coaching sessions was to instill confidence and enable T.R. to undergo a panel interview without faltering." In the eyes of the administration, this was necessary, because Taylor "was the most highly qualified candidate for the job" and the aim of the selection process was to find a strong individual who could "pull the school together."

Second, the chair of the Mantle selection committee (which oversees the interview panels and whose composition is established by the central office) was Taylor's original supervising principal during his first vice principalship. This chair, together with another elementary principal and the director of personnel (an intimate of the superintendent), determined the questions to be asked during the panel interviews and assigned questions to specific panel members.

Taylor was not without competition. Among the other candidates were an elementary school administrator seeking a transfer, and a former elementary school administrator

who was attempting to reenter administration after a one-year return to the classroom. Taylor's chief competitor, however, was a minority woman who had been in the district for 25 years and who had extensive teaching and administrative experience. Among her achievements were several years' experience coordinating district-wide curriculum and special instructional programs, including the institution of libraries in all schools in the district. She had also been an elementary principal for one year.

Why Taylor rather than his chief competitor was selected as principal is not clear. The administration maintained during our interviews that Taylor was simply the "best candidate," yet could not substantiate this from the records. Some parents had pushed hard for a woman principal and one of their members said she found veteran senior administrators "were just not ready to appoint a woman principal at a regular school." More importantly, we think, Taylor had been a loyal member of the long-term administrative ingroup who managed the district for 30 years and he was a protege of one of its leading members. He had not graduated from the preferred private university nearby, which slowed his progress up the career ladder, and he had no elementary level experience. Still, he fulfilled the image of "manliness" which was described repeatedly as of highest importance in this community. He is acceptable to the Mantle faculty precisely *because* he does not "meddle with instruction."

Ironically, this particular district has one of the more technically impressive selection processes that we encountered in Phase 1, complete with a "paper screening" committee to review credentials, a "selection" committee to oversee each vacancy, and two separate panels of screening interviewers. Taylor's case was not an aberrant failure of this technique, but rather was characteristic of the dynamics and operation of the selection process in this district. As such, it clearly illustrates the obvious: the techniques of selection are *not* the key to the process.

Conclusions

We have not chosen the case histories of those principals who were selected without any regard for merit. Our cases in this chapter are limited to those defined by their peers and faculties as excellent, good, or mildly mediocre performers. This is not accidental, for none of our 30 specifically tracked recent appointments led us to the doorstep of a manifest failure. In part, this is the result of the identification procedures. We had to rely on personnel directors or assistant directors for our leads. In examining other files on location, however, we could see that while those selected were among the best qualified, they were not that different from other recent appointees. Common selection procedures in operation today, in other words, do succeed in fending off or weeding out grossly unqualified candidates. Interviewing administrators in every district who had been principals between 1945 and 1970, or who were from that cohort and still on the job, we could sense that even in the most patronage-ridden of districts, not to mention those in the process of great positive change, the standard for appointment has been raised significantly.

Our cases further suggest that the range of appointees has begun to open up. Some candidates who are not white males, who are not part of a longstanding local network of patronage, and who do not conform to local stereotypes, are now getting appointed as principals. One of our districts was feeling intense pressure from what the personnel director called "the Gals in Company C," meaning the central curriculum unit where federal

and state projects in compensatory, special and bilingual instruction were being developed. Their new expertise and self-confidence was threatening the balances adhered to by the 'old-boy' network of administrators.

Our cases make the point, however, that selection pathways today are often chance-ridden, that even when merit and equity triumph they may do so for reasons that have to do with the maneuvers of transfer, the consolidation of a superintendent's authority, or the turning of the wheel of political fortune. An aspiring educator can learn from these case histories the best ways in which to plot her career moves, but she will also learn that even the best laid plots of would-be principals go awry.

We met many educators who express belief in the importance of the principalship but who are personally repelled by the aura of plots and maneuvers that continues to surround the selection process in many instances. Our first case, Jessie Pratt, suggests that in profoundly exceptional instances, merit simply gets demonstrated and rises. Even here, 14 years in teaching represents a very long period in waiting. There was a time when more teachers, nearly all of them men, aspired to be principals—just because the pay difference offset the displeasure of maneuvering. That gap has been closed in many districts, and in an era of growing teacher discouragement about future public support for public education, the parity in pay combines with a disenchantment toward administration—sometimes spurred into alienation by union-management conflicts. The results can be a thinning of the ranks of candidates.

Nevertheless, all 30 of our recent principal appointees were educators who wanted the position, who were glad to get it, and who showed no inclination to withdraw from the role. As our subsample of five cases in this chapter suggests, some had aimed at principalships almost from the time they began as professionals while others became motivated along the route. There is enough magnetism left in the position to attract an inexhaustible supply of aspirants, we suspect. Without changes of the kinds described in the next chapter in the integrity and vitality of the selection process, however, the ablest educational leaders may never turn their faces toward that magnet.

Part II: Alternatives and Suggestions for Improvement

Chapter 4

SOME EXEMPLARY ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PRINCIPAL SELECTION

Our Phase 1 study of common practices in principal selection suggested three major implications to guide our Phase 2 study of alternatives and improvements. First, many educators expressed a real need for more knowledge about how to sharpen selection criteria, particularly in the area of educational leadership skills. Second, many expressed concern about finding better ways of conducting behavioral or performance assessments of candidates. Third, our Phase 1 districts revealed that the influence of local context is so strong that viable alternatives must be flexible and adaptable, so that they can be fitted to each district's unique needs and values.

Based on these implications and with the help of our Study Advisory Panel, we distilled the range of potential alternatives for study to three: (1) assessment centers, which constitute a burgeoning 'movement' in the field of educational administration; (2) internships, which have long been on the scene and are attractive to many districts as methods of sharpening, enriching, and stabilizing the grooming process; and (3) 'exemplary conventional' districts, or rather, those districts that depend upon neither an assessment center nor an internship, but nonetheless were nominated because they 'do it well.'

Assessment centers and internships both address the need for more information on behavioral or performance measures of candidates, and the need for knowledge about identifying and sharpening criteria. For districts that do not wish to invest in assessment centers or internships—both of which consume considerable resources—the exemplary conventional districts provide useful models of other ways of sharpening criteria and behaviorally assessing candidates. Further, these districts can serve to illustrate immediate changes that could be made, should a district desire to change.

Identifying representative districts for the assessment center and internship alternatives was comparatively straightforward. For the former, we contacted the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), which has developed and is completing field testing of probably the most comprehensively designed educationally oriented assessment center available today. NASSP welcomed our inquiry, and opened the doors to our study of the NASSP Assessment Center in one of their 13 demonstration/pilot test sites, Howard County, Maryland.

For the internship option, we sought to identify two sites through a nomination and literature review process. We limited our focus to internships owned and operated by school districts themselves, with the aim of better training and grooming candidates for the principalships. Through a series of iterative phone calls around the nation, we identified two internship programs that were repeatedly nominated as 'outstanding' or 'excellent.' (This is not to imply that no other internships were mentioned in this category, or that our query for nominations was exhaustive. In fact, other programs were nominated. Further, our inquiry did not systematically tap all 50 states.) The two programs selected for study were in Hayward, California and Montgomery County, Maryland.

Finally, to select our exemplary conventional sites, we drew upon the Florida Council on Educational Management for assistance. The Council is a newly formed, state-level organization directed from the state superintendent's office. Its purpose is to conduct research and demonstration projects aimed at improving the performance of Florida's principals. Using their extensive data bases on principal performance (and district selection processes), the Council nominated two Florida districts known to have both a high concentration of 'high performing principals' (as measured by various indices, including student performance) and at least minimally sound selection procedures. Both of these districts—Broward County and Hillsborough County—welcomed our inquiry.

The following sections of this chapter provide thumbnail sketches of practices in each of the five Phase 2 districts, which differ among themselves in definitive technical details to a far greater extent than did the ten Phase 1 districts. Following the thumbnail sketches, we present an analysis of points of differences between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts, and their origins. Readers interested in the fine detail of alternative practices may wish to obtain the full report on the five districts. It is entitled *School Principal Selection Practices: Five Case Studies*, 1982, Abt Associates, 55 Wheeler Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

The NASSP Assessment Center in Howard County, Maryland

Long established in business and industry as a tool for identifying managerial talent, an assessment center is in essence a rigorous, standardized, and highly structured method of evaluating—by means of multiple observers and techniques—a candidate's performance on several behaviorally defined skills. During the 1970s, the assessment center approach to personnel identification and selection began moving into education, and since 1975 the National Association of Secondary School Principals of Reston, Virginia, has been engaged in developing and pilot testing (and evaluating) an assessment center model for use by school districts in selecting principals (or assistant principals).

One of the most notable characteristics of the NASSP Assessment Center model is that it is contractually standardized for all adopting districts in both its basic technical operation and its key implementation requirements, with much emphasis given to the latter. However, the basic technical features of the NASSP model are common to assessment centers in general. First, the Center is an *event*, not a place, and is conducted as frequently as the adopting district desires. Each Center is conducted by a group of six highly trained assessors, whose charge it is to observe, measure and evaluate 12 candidates as they complete various exercises and simulations. Assessor training is crucial to the validity and reliability of the Center, for the scoring of the various exercises is behaviorally grounded,

and standardized to a high degree of precision. Hence, assessors participate in a three-day (and evening) training session at NASSP offices in Reston, and are then monitored by a NASSP representative for at least the first two Centers they conduct. (Spot monitoring is done thereafter.)

Selection of the assessors is also viewed as extremely important, both in terms of their local roles and their personal potential for becoming good assessors—they must be accurate, precise, and comfortable with a 'behavioral evidence' approach to observation and evaluation of staff. In addition, it is critical that assessor teams be balanced for race and sex, and include both principals and district administrators.

At each Center, the six assessors evaluate each of the 12 participants on 12 skills dimensions: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interests, personal motivation, and educational values. These dimensions have been empirically determined and validated as important to the principalship and are measured by specifically related exercises and simulations. While all NASSP Assessment Centers evaluate all 12 of these dimensions, adopting districts may choose to weight them differently depending on local needs and philosophies.

Each Assessment Center is a major event in the professional lives of both the assessors and the participants. For the latter, the Center is a two-day experience; for the former, a five-day affair. During the first two days, the assessors observe the candidates as they perform the various exercises and simulations, recording their behavior in great detail and in accordance with the Center's standards and guidelines. The last three days are given over to group meetings of the assessors, during which each candidate's performance is discussed. Each candidate is given a summary score (according to behavioral standards and guidelines) *based on the evidence* provided by the assessors' reports prepared during the exercises. At the end of the discussion of each candidate, the group assigns a final rating to the candidate's performance. The group discussions are quite structured in the sense that there are standards and rules for discussing and rating candidates. Great stress is placed on the central rule that all discussion and rating must be grounded in evidence and linked to specific, recorded behaviors of the candidate.

When the assessors' discussions are complete and final ratings have been assigned, a detailed report is prepared on each candidate. The reports cover areas of strength, needs for improvement, and training and development recommendations. The reports are precise and behaviorally cast, and each of the 12 skill areas is addressed in some detail. The assessment report is then given to the candidate and discussed in a confidential feedback interview.

Howard County's NASSP Assessment Center is being implemented in the administrative context of an already highly professionalized approach to principal selection. In this context, the primary purpose of the Assessment Center for the present is to provide a method for more finely and rigorously discriminating among candidates. Data from the Center now constitute central, albeit not the only, pieces of information for the screening committee and for the superintendent in making his final decision. District administrators estimate that the Center's ability to discriminate will reduce the candidate pool (probably by half or better) and provide much more information about each candidate that is recommended to the superintendent. In addition, the district expects that the Center will increase the certainty of due process by standardizing assessment of specific job-related

skills. Finally, the Center will provide definitive feedback to the candidates themselves, and district leaders hope ultimately to use it for staff development purposes. (NASSP has devised training activities for each of the 12 skills.)

The Administrative Intern Program (AIP) in Hayward Unified School District (HUSD), California

The HUSD Internship program began operating in 1979. Its approach consists of locating and then training potential principals from *within* the district. Each April, all certificated non-management employees of HUSD are notified of the AIP by the posting of an announcement. In response, applicants submit letters of intent and complete problem exercises (required as part of the application), which are evaluated without name identification by the 13 members of the superintendent's cabinet. Candidates that pass this first screening are then interviewed individually for 30 minutes each by six-member groups from the cabinet. Interviewers complete separate, undiscussed, numerical rating sheets on each candidate and candidates also complete another written problem exercise. Candidates that pass the second screening are admitted to the AIP.

The AIP includes a variety of opportunities for training, such as visitations, observations, conferences and workshops, interviews, substituting, attendance at board and council meetings, and formal training sessions. Areas of training include personnel evaluation; curriculum development and instruction; contract, budget, and facilities management; conflict management; time management; state and federal programs; due process; and role of superintendent and board. The program seeks to develop both specific substantive skills and more general skills such as listening, problem solving, leadership, communications, and human relations. The AIP is intensely scheduled. There are seven full-day didactic sessions from December through June of the interns' year, and constant workshops, conferences, and observations. HUSD senior officers are heavily involved in the training of interns, but outside experts participate as well.

AIP ends in June, with the close of the school year. Vacancies for vice principalships, principalships, and similar administrative positions are then announced and interns may choose to become candidates, as do others in the system who are already qualified. The selection procedure is closely analogous to the procedure for selection into the AIP, with the same cabinet members performing the same roles. An intern who has completed her M.A. and who is appointed to an administrative vacancy serves, if she accepts, as an intern principal for a year. This probationary condition was not built into AIP but was added in 1980 by the superintendent because of his belief that the training period is not yet complete and because changes in administrative assignments are commonplace within HUSD anyway.

The HUSD superintendent said he installed the AIP because "I became appalled at the low quality of preparation characteristic of school administrators here and elsewhere. They seemed to me to learn how to repeat the mistakes made by others and they suffered from *isolation* on the job. . . I wanted to correct for these conditions and I wanted to combat the choice of principals through 'buddyism'."

The interns we interviewed regard the AIP as most worthwhile for its orienting, role-building, and associative features. They do not think of the didactic sessions as formally

preparatory, nor do any of them believe that the homework task products are a sound basis for evaluation. In short, it is sustained interaction with supervising principals and some central office administrators, combined with some chances to try out on the job, which are regarded as uniquely worthwhile.

The AIP has also opened the ranks of administration to women in Hayward. Before World War II, women used to become elementary school principals but rarely anything higher. Today in HUSD, as a result of the AIP and related reductions in sexism in the Bay Area, "only jobs like dean of women are sex-bound," said a women intern, "and even the deans deal with both sexes in some matters." One woman has become a junior high school principal and several are newly appointed as elementary principals and high school vice principals. "When a woman becomes the principal of one of Hayward's comprehensive high schools," said one intern, "this district will be fully open to both sexes." She thought this could happen very soon.

The AIP works in Hayward to train, assess, and select educational leaders better than most procedures we have studied from coast to coast. It has met its founders' major objectives, and in their eyes the expense has been slight when contrasted with the yield in increased competency, organizational unity, and reported impacts on the instructional services of many Hayward public schools. Its benefits spring from its auspice. It is the creature of an exceptionally autonomous and contractually empowered superintendent, conjoined with the excellence fostered by a contemporary, knowledgeable staff of personnel administrators. Its costs spring from the same sources: there is almost no involvement with outside groups because the ties to the central administration are so tight. This restricts expanding the legitimacy of the AIP over time and may shorten its life-span.

The Administrative Training Program (ATP) of the Montgomery County Public School System, Maryland

The Administrative Training Program (ATP) of the Montgomery County Public School System is actually a three-part program involving: (1) a career development phase; (2) an administrative internship phase to prepare candidates for the principalship; and (3) a district-run assessment center to assess interns as they complete the training program. After passing successfully through these gates, a candidate enters open competition for the job of principal. For this study, we were primarily concerned with the internship, which is indeed the heart and soul of the ATP.

The administrative internship itself (which we shall henceforth refer to as the ATP for brevity) is an intensive, on-the-job training program. Applicants undergo a "book rating" whereby top district leaders review material for each candidate and give a structured ranking based on degrees, experiences, skills as noted in a mandated resume format, certification, references, and evaluations. Then, the top ranked candidates are invited to the Administrative Competence Sessions, which are in essence mini-assessment centers designed to evaluate candidates' interpersonal skills, communication and conceptual skills, and group leadership skills. The assessors consist of administrative and supervisory personnel, such as associate superintendents, principals, directors and supervisors.

Candidates are given points for their performances on each of the activities in the Competence Sessions, and are then ranked. Names of the top ranked persons are placed on "the

administrative intern list" for two years. When an opening for an assistant principal occurs in a school, the decision is made by the superintendent concerning placement of a current assistant principal or an administrative intern in that position. If an intern opening is set, selected persons from the list are interviewed by a panel; then one person is selected to participate in the administrative internship program.

Each intern, serving as assistant principal for one year, experiences a wide range of activities which include the following areas: instructional program, staff, pupil personnel, management, community involvement and professional growth. The principal to whom the intern has been assigned is responsible for the allocation of duties similar to those performed by an assistant principal and is also the primary trainer and supervisor of the intern. However, monthly seminars between the intern and her supervisory team (of various district administrators) are a major component of the program. At each seminar, the intern presents an analysis of a log of daily activities and discusses a selected activity analysis that deals with an issue such as supervision of instruction, pupil personnel, or community and parent involvement as it has contributed to growth and on which the intern seeks guidance. The team's role is to provide support, guidance, and evaluation (interim and final) of the intern. The intern is paid on the teacher's salary scale for the year, and the difference between this amount and the salary of an assistant principal is used for additional instructional programs and resources for the intern. After an individual needs assessment, specific training activities are planned for the intern. These feature either the extension of knowledge about the school system or the development of skills and knowledge in educational management, leadership, and supervision.

Upon successful completion of the program, the intern is interviewed for an assistant principal position as soon as an appropriate one becomes available. Following a term in this position, the candidate may compete for the principalship. Candidates for school principal are observed and reviewed through a local assessment center, to which they are invited after a review of their credentials, recommendations and personnel folders by the system's Appointments Committee. The center requires two days and puts each candidate through five exercises designed to give him an opportunity to demonstrate specific competencies in five skill areas: group leadership and problem solving; analyzing classroom teacher behavior and conducting subsequent conferences with teachers; oral presentation; written communication; and organization and management. Candidates who successfully complete the assessment center are then interviewed by the superintendent (and other relevant top administrators) for placement as principals.

Everyone interviewed agreed that the strength of the internship experience is taken chiefly from the intern's repeated interaction with members of the supervisory teams, useful as the training and self-study opportunities are. It is through encounters with the supervisory team—whose members include the supervising principals as well as some members of the Appointments Committee—that the intern becomes socialized to administration while the Committee has time to build a deep, extended familiarity with the judgment and character of the intern as a future leader.

The superintendent and his Appointments Committee also use the ATP as a means for affirmative action. The achievement is dramatic for women. Six women now serve as junior high and middle school principals. Many more are in charge of elementary schools, and two have become high school principals. In the 1975-76 school year, 13 percent of the new administrative and supervisory appointees were from racial minorities, and during the 1981-82 school year, this proportion rose to 24 percent.

Principal selection within Montgomery County is greatly enhanced by the ATP. The internship program is quite old, going back in fact to the late 1950s when some of its basic features were first introduced. The ATP will not fade away, because it is viewed by the board as a means of conserving and upgrading leadership, although it may undergo many changes during the late 1980s as retrenchment pressures continue to build.

Exemplary Conventional Practices in Broward County, Florida

Broward County's principal selection process has three main elements: (1) an "eligibility list," which expresses basic selection criteria and career ladders; (2) a "vacancy screening," which rates eligible candidates against the specific requirements of each vacancy; and (3) the "vacancy interview," which selects the finalists from among the most highly rated eligible candidates. The process begins with the compilation of eligibility lists, which contain the names of all qualified candidates. In order to get on the list, the candidate prepares and files with personnel a very lengthy and detailed application. In addition, the candidate must list the names of references, including all supervisors of one year's duration during the five years preceeding the application date. Upon receipt of the application, personnel sends out standard recommendation forms to the references listed by the applicant. The recommendation forms are *empirically* designed to help counter excessive subjectivity or halo effects from the recommending supervisor.

Candidates can and do file applications for placement on the eligibility list at any time. Personnel reviews an application immediately upon receiving it, and notifies the applicant of disposition. At this stage, the review consists simply of checking to see that minimum certification and experience requirements have been met. Neither the application nor the references are evaluated yet.

When they arise, school-specific vacancy announcements are sent by mail to all on the eligibility list and are posted throughout the district. Those on the eligibility list who wish to apply for the position (or positions) apply by letter of intent to personnel and are carried into the next step of the process, the vacancy screening, which is conducted by a committee established specifically to review the applications and rate each applicant for the vacancy at hand. The composition of the committee is specified as a matter of policy and includes central and school-level administrators, and minorities and women. Using structured rating forms, the committee conducts *blind* ratings of the applicants based on the lengthy application and references submitted earlier. Each committee member independently examines the data and rates each candidate, assigning a numerical score on a four-point scale to each of 22 items. In order for a candidate to forge ahead at this point, there must be fairly strong consensus among the raters that the individual has done "more" in most of the 22 areas. Competition is keen, and a difference of a very few points is often all that lies between elimination and moving to the the next step in the process.

After all the applicants are rated the head of personnel compiles and averages the ratings and the references to obtain a single "sum-of-the-ratings" score for each candidate. (Excepting vacancies for which there are special criteria, a candidate's score remains in effect for one year, after which time he must reapply and be re-rated.) The candidates are then ranked in order of their scores, and the top four to six are selected to proceed to the next step in the process, the vacancy interview. The exact number selected

for this "vacancy interview list" depends in part on the closeness of the scores and in part on equity considerations.

As soon as the interview list is compiled, a Vacancy Interview Panel is convened. Once again, the composition of the Panel is specified by policy and includes central administrators and parents and teachers from the school in question as well as minorities and women. The task of the Vacancy Interview Panel is to select the top three finalists (unranked). Panelists are provided the candidates' resumes and a checklist of interview questions and items made up by personnel. The Panel may choose to add additional questions and items to explore; however, once the checklist is finalized it is applied to all interviewees. In addition, the equal opportunity office provides a statement of the current district-wide level of utilization and availability of minorities and women for the particular job category under consideration. After a 30-minute interview, the Panelists independently rate each candidate. Each Panelist signs the form for monitoring purposes. After all candidates have been interviewed and rated, the Panel discusses this information and the data on utilization and availability of women and minorities in order to reach consensus on three candidates to recommend as finalists. Once these recommendations are in, the associate superintendent for personnel asks the supervisor of the position to comment on the finalists (and the interview process if he wishes) and recommend his choice for the position. He then takes the list of finalists, the Panelists' signed evaluation sheets for each candidate, the comments and recommendations of the supervisor, and his own comments and recommendations to the superintendent.

This is the superintendent's first entry into the selection process, and his task is to review the credentials of the candidates, the comments and recommendations of the Interview Panel, and the recommendations of the supervisor and personnel office. By his own account, he views his oversight and monitoring role at this stage as crucial and consequential for the credibility of the entire selection process. As he said, "credibility [for the process] resides with the superintendent, not with the staff," and "credibility is the most important thing you have to maintain with regard to this [process]—you might as well chuck the whole thing if you lose credibility. If the perception ever gets out that it's a Good Old Person process, it's all over—you may as well get another superintendent." To this end, the superintendent avoids involvement until the final moment in order to avoid any appearance of undue influence, and monitors very closely to insure that all the procedures are properly followed.

Once the superintendent has completed his review and is satisfied that all is in order and the best employment choice has been made, he carries the appointment recommendation to the board. He does have the authority to recommend an applicant not recommended as a finalist by the Interview Panel, if such a recommendation is accompanied by a written rationale. However, he has never done so. And, in the great majority of cases, the appointee is the person who was recommended by the immediate supervisor.

'Exemplary Conventional' Practices in Hillsborough County, Florida

Hillsborough County's principal selection process is characterized by three main features: (1) well defined and well known career ladders to the principalship, which include universally available development opportunities and careful scrutiny of candidates

by top district administrators; (2) rigorous screening at entry-level positions, conducted by a diversified team composed mainly of school-level staff; and (3) team interviewing of screened and approved applicants for specific vacancies by the seven top administrative leaders in the district.

At the secondary level, the principalship career ladder has three steps: (1) dean; (2) assistant principal; (3) principal. While serving in the deanship, the aspirant is expected to learn "discipline and student relations." In the assistant principal role, the candidate also serves in a functionally specified role or roles. At the elementary level there are no administrative steps in the career ladder; however, in practice, the instructional position of curriculum specialist has become the prerequisite. Each elementary school in the district has a curriculum specialist whose role it is to provide curriculum leadership for the entire school, and this position involves many administrative and coordinating duties. In terms of the district's philosophy, this reflects Hillsborough County's heavy emphasis on curriculum, particularly at the elementary level.

The entry positions of curriculum specialist, dean and assistant principal are all obtained through a two-stage process, by applying first to a Screening Committee to obtain general eligibility status and then directly to the supervising principal when a particular position opens. Applications for general eligibility may be filed at any time, and, as soon as a dozen or so aspirants accumulate (or at least twice a year, in the spring and fall), a Screening Committee is convened. The make-up of the Committee is spelled out in district policy and includes representatives of positions subordinate and superordinate to the slot being filled, as well as peer representatives (and minorities and women). Instructions to the Committee seek to elicit the deepest role identification of each member, and this is one of the keys to its functioning. The Committee interviews and rates each candidate individually and without discussion. The interviews themselve are semi-structured: the Committee generates a set of questions which are applied to all candidates, but is free to ask additional questions. The ratings for each candidate are assigned according to a five-point scale in each of eight categories. The highest and lowest scores for each candidate are discarded, and the remaining scores are averaged. Thirty is the passing score, which means that the applicant must receive at least a four on most items to pass. Approximately 35-40 percent of the candidates for the first-level positions (deans and curriculum specialists) fail the screening. Fewer fail second-level screenings, but even here there are failures.

Once a candidate has passed the screening for curriculum specialist or dean, she must compete with other successful candidates for a position. This competition is under the direct control of the supervising principal, and it is stiff. If a successful candidate fails to secure an appointment within three years of screening, he must be rescreened in order to remain to be eligible for the position category. Once in an entry role, the aspirant undergoes a development and weeding process of several years' duration. Curriculum specialists usually spend five to six years in the role, and deans and assistant principals may spend even longer periods of time in these slots. In all of these roles, aspirants can avail themselves of numerous developmental and inservice experiences, which also provide district leaders with opportunities to observe their performance.

Candidates apply for vacant principalships in two ways: (1) by responding to advertisements in the *Administrative Bulletin* and (2) by being a member of the screened and approved candidate pool, which automatically confers applicant status. Applicants are interviewed by the Interview Committee, which plays a crucial role in principal appoint-

ments in Hillsborough County. It consists of the superintendent, the six assistant superintendents, and the appropriate area directors. Its fundamental role is to reach consensus about who should be principal at which school. Each candidate is called before the Interview Committee for an interview that generally lasts about 30 minutes, and is regarded as extremely important by both candidates and the Interview Committee. The structure is open-ended, and candidates who have been through the process characterize the questions as "What do you think about policy X or decision Y" questions, as compared to the "What would you do if" type of questions that characterize the entry-level screenings. The Interview Committee waits until all candidates have been interviewed before discussing any. No rating forms are used, although individual Committee members may make notes as they desire. Questioning is free-flowing, and each Committee member queries the candidate at will.

The Committee often meets two or three times to discuss and review issues and candidates. According to several members, the discussions tend to focus on candidate-school *matches*, based on both student and community needs and the candidate's instructional/administrative skills and personality/public relations skills. The Interview Committee strives for consensus in its final recommendations, and usually attains it. In fact, our informants noted that a failure of consensus had never happened. If this should occur, the superintendent would, in his own words, "step in and take one side or the other." In actuality, the authority for the decision always rests with the superintendent. However, the essential decision-making is done consensually by the top management team in committee.

Comparative Analysis

Phase 2 districts do share some features with Phase 1 districts. However, in most respects, the Phase 2 districts dramatically differ from the Phase 1 districts in their principal selection practices in several key ways.

First, all of the Phase 2 districts have substantially sharpened their selection criteria, linking them strongly to merit standards. This is expressed through statements of eligibility requirements, and through candidate grooming experiences. The net effects of these practices are to intensify the merit-orientation of both the unstated and stated criteria, and to minimize the influence of vague notions of 'fit' and 'image.' The density, specificity, and public nature of the criteria and grooming needs make it difficult for 'fit' to prevail over the merit the criteria and grooming demand. By the time a candidate has completed a rigorous internship or a lengthy apprenticeship just for the privilege of competing for a principalship, both he and the district have made a substantial and public investment in skills acquisition. It is not likely that this will be easily overthrown in favor of some ambiguous notion of 'fit.'

Second, all of the Phase 2 districts devote considerable time and energy to developing and maintaining a ready pool of tested and assessed applicants. This is done apart from any specific vacancy (although vacancy estimates often determine the size of the pool). Then when vacancies do occur—either in the flow of the school year or in an emergency—the district invites the pool to compete. This investment has several payoffs for the Phase 2 sites. First, the level of candidate quality tends to spiral ever higher as candidates compete more intensely to stay afloat in the pool. Second, the district gains especially high quality staff while the candidates wait for a chance at a principalship. The assistant prin-

cipal or curriculum specialist who has prepared for a candidacy is generally regarded by these districts as bringing more to the assistant principalship than one who has not prepared for anything more. Hence, the Phase 2 districts feel that a large pool of prepared candidates enriches not only the principalship, but the lower levels of administration as well.

Third, screening in the Phase 2 districts is highly distinguishable from screening in Phase 1 sites by what might be termed *layering*. In the Phase 2 districts, almost everything about screening comes in multiples or layers. Screening is at least a two-or-three tier process: applicants are screened at entry; as they pass through the career ladder, internship, or assessment center; and again as they compete for the principalship. Different and independently composed sets of screeners are involved at each step. Screening tends to be intensive at each step, and certainly across the steps, involving more than just an interview.

Further, candidates in the Phase 2 districts have a much greater sense of passing through a *sequence* of ever narrowing gates as they are 'weeded out' through the screening steps. These perceptions are borne out by the hard data that were available: Howard County reports that 50 percent fail to achieve a satisfactory rating in the Assessment Center; Hillsborough reports that 35–40 percent fail to pass the entry-level screenings; Broward estimates that better than half of those rated in vacancy screenings fail to attain a high enough score to get within range of being called for an interview when a vacancy opens up (the difference can be a matter of a very few points).

None of the Phase 1 systems approached this degree of investment in screening and preparing candidates. Even those which had internships used the program much differently, giving it less attention and treating it more as a staff development program than as a requirement for candidacy. Further, even in 'conventional' Broward and Hillsborough Counties—which relied upon career ladders and grooming—the grooming process was much denser and far more specified than in the Phase 1 districts. For instance, Phase 1 informants spoke of candidates' being groomed through "being active" in the district and "serving on committees" to "get known." If pressed, they could give some examples of the kinds of service expected, which appeared to have only one common thread: it helped the candidate become visible and socialized into the leadership group. In even these two Phase 2 districts, however, informants universally knew *which* committees and planning teams candidates were expected to serve on, and what kind of *substantive* contributions they were expected to make.

Fourth, at the final decision point, the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts shared in common the fact that the superintendent retained authority and control. However, there were two striking differences. On the one hand, the Phase 2 superintendents appeared to rely heavily on the data provided by the process. In other words, while Phase 1 superintendents relied greatly on their interpersonal judgments or those of trusted lieutenants, Phase 2 superintendents relied greatly on the evidence from their selection process, in which they had invested considerable energies developing and/or refining. On the other hand, the Phase 2 superintendents seemed to share their authority more widely and easily than did most of the Phase 1 leaders. For instance, in the two Florida districts, the eligibility screening committees have genuine control over the entry gates. Sponsorship and connections simply do not matter: if an applicant cannot get by these gates he *cannot* aspire to a principalship. Even where the Phase 2 superintendents are less broadly inclusive, there nonetheless appears to be genuine sharing of authority occurring within the more limited circle of decision-makers. (Interestingly, the superintendents of those Phase 1 districts that

seemed to be reaching for or on the verge of reaching for major changes in their selection process appeared to share this characteristic.)

Fifth, the Phase 2 districts factor sex and racial/ethnic equity goals into their selection processes at several diverse junctures, but all of them do this in ways that enable them to take affirmative action while preserving leadership merit objectives. They *plan* to appoint women and minorities and they do so in substantial numbers without departing from their other procedures.

Sixth, the credibility accorded to the selection process is much higher in the Phase 2 districts in two respects. Board members, administrators, and teachers take strong pride in the fairness, competitive vigor, and comprehensiveness of the processes. And, more crucially we believe, the processes used have the effect of heightening the prestige and esteem attributed by all parties to the principalship itself. The Phase 2 districts seem to operate on the notion: the harder the race, the bigger the prize. By making the race tough, the prize of the principalship increases in worth, status, and prestige.

Seventh, the Phase 2 superintendents reported more freedom to make merit-based appointment decisions. Many factors still conditioned a single appointment: transfers that needed to be made, planning for future school closings, the totality of the management team at the school with the opening. However, the Phase 2 superintendents were largely free of the *political* pressures that often colored the process in Phase 1. The 'cronyistic' and patronage networks were neutralized by the selection process itself, which in four of the five Phase 2 districts, had been designed to accomplish precisely this end (as we shall discuss shortly).

Eighth, on one level, the Phase 2 selection processes are observably *far less efficient* than those in Phase 1 districts. Much more time and money is expended per appointment in Phase 2 sites. Training costs are higher, personnel paperwork is ten times greater perhaps, and staff coordination activities are very much more time-consuming. At another level, Phase 2 superintendents argue, with no reservations and as if in one voice, that their aim is to reach the targets of highest leadership merit and equity, and that efficiency standards have to be governed by whether the means achieve the ends. Hence, to the Phase 2 districts, the loss of efficiency is well worth it.

Accounting for the Differences

The 15 districts in the study, taken as two samples, did not differ radically in terms of organization, economic well-being, or stages of enrollment stability or decline. They ranged from very poor to wealthy in terms of revenues per pupil, large to moderate size, centralized to decentralized, and they were located in states with high degrees of policy initiative and states that are nearly quiescent.

Why then the difference? We think that there is one primary reason – as revealed by the histories of the five Phase 2 districts *and* some changes that were beginning to occur in a few of the Phase 1 districts at the time of our visit – that plays out in the life of the district in two or three critical ways. Three of the five Phase 2 districts had undergone dramatic *political* changes within their school boards and administrations some time between 1970

and 1980. Only Montgomery County and Howard County differed on this, and each had made just such a change several years earlier. The three had reached a point where board members had decided to bury past practices and to reform their principal selections in a deep, long-term way. At that point, they had searched for and found superintendents who were willing and able to accomplish the reforms. Some came from within their districts and others come from the 'outside,' but all were sophisticated practitioners of modern personnel management principles. *The 'watershed' nature of this point of departure cannot be overstated.*

In Hillsborough County, for example, the system had been characterized by cronyism and buddyism at best, and, more typically, by naked patronage in a political spoils system of both instructional and administrative appointments that reached into city government. As one informant comments, "Even the good people back then were chosen for the wrong reason." The situation came to a head in the late 1960s, and the Hillsborough board decided to make a dramatic shift and correct the situation permanently. It appointed highly capable leadership whose *first* priority was improving the principalship. This fundamental and critical mandate for a commitment to improving principal selection then proceeded to play out in the life of the district over the next 14 years. The board appointed a new superintendent of high integrity who was deeply committed to cleanup, giving him a special mandate, and the leaders continually tinkered with the selection process until the process was fine-tuned to the highly elaborated enterprise that it is today. This growth and development involved not just adjusting screening techniques, but, much more deeply, role changes for district leaders.

Hillsborough's story of watershed change is repeated in its essence for each of the five Phase 2 districts. The rhythms may vary, the circumstances and emphases differ in detail, but the fundamental message is the same. In sum, we hypothesize that the *striking* differences between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 districts are accountable for by a change process that moves through several basic steps.

First, a 'watershed' of crisis or opportunity is reached. The 'watershed' constitutes a real demarcation point: the situation is such that a decision must be taken, something *must* be done, and the school board takes the necessary decision. At this early point, it *is* the board's decision, for the school system itself is either in trouble, or there is no leader there capable of leading on the other side of the 'watershed.'

Second, the school board changes the district's leadership and/or the leadership's mandates. The board may reach outside for a new superintendent, or they may choose from the ranks of current administrators. Regardless, the new superintendent will be a 'new man' for the 'new day,' and the board will give him a special mandate to overhaul the system.

Third, the new superintendent will view reform and revitalization of the principalship as a critical task and will begin to tackle this immediately. Great effort and energy will be expended in devising and testing out a new system. This effort will *not* stop at technical features of the selection process (e.g., how screening interviews are conducted), but will involve significant role changes for district leaders, and may even involve hiring special staff or reallocating district personnel to conduct training programs or assessment centers. The tinkering and fine-tuning will be endless. The leadership and other district staff will be continually on the alert for methods and strategies of making even more improvements.

Finally, a considerable degree of pride will build up around the 'fairness' and the 'difficulty' of the selection process. The principalship itself will be enhanced as a result.

Once we began to understand this evolutionary process in our Phase 2 sites, we could look back over our Phase 1 sites and see what appeared to be the beginnings of the process in some of these districts. Two, for instance, had just had 'watershed' moments that led to the appointments of new superintendents with reform mandates from their boards. These new superintendents were beginning to tackle and change the principal selection processes (and the principals) they had inherited. We also visited one or two Phase 1 districts that seemed to us to be on the verge of evolving into their own 'watershed' moments. In these districts, many informants at all levels painted a picture of substantial discontent with what they perceived to be a 'good old boy,' cronyistic, 'buddy'-oriented principal selection system. Comments, even from principals who had successfully negotiated the system to secure their appointments, were sometimes bitter, as respondents complained that their own professionalism was undercut by the process.

Much remains to be learned about the reasons why some districts choose to adopt sweeping reforms of their principal selection process. Clearly, the 'watershed' moments appear to be critical. Beyond these, however, is the deeper question of what leads a board – or community – to a watershed. In other words, given that school systems reflect the values and desires of the local community, what causes local communities to shift in ways that are consequential for their school systems? We cannot answer this question, for it was beyond the scope of our inquiry. We can speculate, however, that when opportunities or needs for general reform arise in the larger community (local or state) – whether from a crisis of confidence or from an opportunity to reach for and attain 'something better' – the public polity can be mobilized for change.

Much remains to be learned about the process, however. And much remains to be learned about whether these reforms or alternative practices actually produce 'real' comparative outcomes, as might be revealed by empirically comparing the performances of principals appointed in the ways described in Chapter 2 and the ways encompassed in our Phase 2 sites.

Nevertheless, neither these caveats nor the details we have presented about procedures and events should obscure the encouraging fact that positively exemplary practices do exist, can be transferred to other settings, and do appear to produce deep changes in who becomes a principal. Furthermore, those changes appear to ramify widely across other features of local school systems, raising levels of staff morale, improving the quality and efficiency of service, and upgrading the learning opportunities for students. The more detailed evidence also helped us to locate *certain limits on the transferability of alternative practices*: we have found that local board members and administrators have the ability to search out and develop those particular procedures which might work best in their settings. It is this local process of self-design which gives the alternatives their efficacy.

Chapter 5

IDEAS ON DEVELOPING A PRINCIPAL SELECTION PROCEDURE

Introduction

The aim of this final chapter is to help guide decisions about whether and how to develop better principal selection procedures (PSP) in local public school systems. We do not argue that PSPs *ought* to be improved—only that this possibility presents itself frequently in many communities as one means of increasing the effectiveness of schools.

Here, then, we shall explore the gains that can be achieved by changing PSPs, if a school board chooses to do so as a matter of policy. In addition, we make some recommendations about design which seem, from the record of evidence from 15 districts (all of them hosting well over 10,000 students), to offer no "one best approach" but an array of possibilities.

Selecting Principals for What?

Van Cleve Morris and his associates studied the day-to-day behavior of *The Urban Principal* (1981). They concluded that the duties and responsibilities of the position are usually "loosely worded and open-ended" (p. 128), but they did make a list of duties most often attached to the position. To this we have added others that came up in our study to yield the following combined list:

1. Organization of school setting;
2. Resource and logistical management;
3. Staff supervision;
4. Staff evaluation;
5. Staff development;
6. Student discipline and safety;
7. Instructional improvement;
8. Curriculum innovation;
9. Spokesperson or symbolic agent of both school and district.

Principals fulfill these duties in individually varied ways. Each puts a somewhat different emphasis on the performance of each day's set of tasks. Styles and time given to tasks vary substantially, just as there are multiple ways of going about each duty. Yet, the list of duties is fairly universal across as well as within districts.

How the list of expectations will be ordered, how varied the performance style will be, and what will result from the leadership effort, depend on local system conditions. Our study places the role of the principal in the context of terms and conditions of selection for the role, just as the Morris study places it in the context of daily activities within schools. Valuable as the latter is in providing an accurate picture of what principals in one system *do* hour by hour, this picture depends for its meaning on who was chosen for the job, what the principals think they were selected to do more or less intensively, and what others – teachers, parents, other administrators – make of the integrity of the selection process.

Are board members and administrators going to search for principals who can do *all* things well, or will they compromise and emphasize some skills at one time or place, general merit at another, and racial or sex equity at still another? Are the number of considerations entailed in a complete commitment to a merit-based, equity-centered, full-spectrum-of-ability search so costly as to overtax the resources of a district? How much does the complex web of leadership considerations matter relative to other challenges?

Two events have begun to change the way in which these questions are answered. First, as the deputy superintendent of Montgomery County, Maryland, noted, public school personnel changes have meant that in 1960 an expanding district would have six principalships to fill and five semi-qualified candidates, while in 1982 it may have one opening and four administrators with seniority who are potentially surplus, together with a large pool of applicants. Second, as ancillary administrative staff are reduced – and the pace of this trend has quickened since 1980 – the importance of the school principal intensifies.

There are many ways in which boards and superintendents choose to deal with the resulting challenge. The most common choice in the 1980s is often called the rotation policy, which comes down to transferring principals from school to school and, in the process, counseling out some by retiring them early or returning them to other positions. Another choice is to beef up inservice training, helping principals in place to do a better job. A third choice – and all of these may be used in combination, of course – is to restructure the chain of command so that principals may intensify their efforts on some duties and transfer others to other staff.

Variable conceptions of the job of principal that people at the local district level hold in common shape the PSP. For example, a strong emphasis on *fitting* veteran teachers into the job through informal grooming usually signifies that principals are part of a process designed to conserve district traditions. The principal appointed in the fashion described in Chapter 2 performs most of the duties listed above, but performs them according to longstanding customs and local norms.

In contrast, a principal appointed through an internship program such as the one in Hayward, California, described in Chapter 4, is expected to *initiate* changes, to 'troubleshoot,' and to carry both problems and possible solutions forward to the central administration. A principal appointed in Montgomery County, Maryland, is expected not

only to initiate in these ways but to move along a continuously evaluated career path where success and failure are assessed intensively.

Thus, the method of selection affects the concept of degree of initiative. It expresses the level of confidence placed on the position as well as on persons who occupy it. In the two Florida cases, the principalship has come to be loaded with extra duties, including controllership. Thus, selection procedures there have become very demanding.

This final chapter is addressed to local leaders who want to consider changing their selection procedures in order to appoint principals capable of giving high performances on all of the duties listed above, and in order to make appointments in a merit-based, equity-centered way.

Principal Selection and School Effectiveness

New knowledge about improving the effectiveness of schools is currently being disseminated widely. This knowledge emphasizes the pivotal role of the principal in leading a school toward the conditions described in the research. Many of the ideas for improvement can be exchanged, adopted, and put to work by principals already on the job, of course. Yet, many of these men and women were *not* selected because of their ability to accomplish this or similar aims, and it is difficult to change the basic expectations which originally defined a particular principalship.

The obvious connection between PSP and school effectiveness is that candidates relatively best equipped to exert instructional and supervisory leadership *and* best able to match teaching resources with learning needs, would be those most likely to apply and to get appointed as principals. Even if this connection were perfect, a particular school might fail to become a place where student achievement increased. No one change has the strength to reorganize conditions in all necessary respects. Still, the odds would improve substantially and this is the leveraging advantage so many districts yearn for today.

Everyone we interviewed registered a positive belief in the instrumental importance of the school principal. Some teachers expressed the qualification that this importance comes up out of the support given principals by teachers, and some teachers seemed so discouraged about the prospects for public education in their communities and states as to lead them to doubt whether principals could offset downward trends. And, many of these discouraged, glum teachers were alienated from their school boards and superintendents. The Phase 2 districts disclosed no such faculty despair, however.

In any event, where fiscal conditions and management-labor relations have not become too strained, people involved in public education have no difficulty in seeing or in spelling out the hoped-for relation between school leadership and school effectiveness. It is this hope which drives efforts to revise leadership selection procedures.

On the Matter of Aims

Concern for improved leadership gets tempered by diverse competing concerns and the result is a kind of unique local meld. In Montgomery County, personnel management practices have come to define the mission of the system across a period of two decades. The quest for advanced, efficient, and results-centered subsystems of personnel mangement has become the main method for differentiating the county's rural, pastoral past from it urban, dynamic present. Personnel testing, highly selective recruitment, continuously provided staff development, and career ladder extensions for every type of occupational subgroup have become the hallmarks of the Montgomery strategy. This strategy is comparatively expensive (which is *not* to say it is cost-ineffective), and therefore depends upon above average revenues for its realization.

Hillsborough County, in contrast, is a fiscally strained district undergoing great regional change. It has adopted comprehensive reforms in its principal selection procedures in the course of adapting to this wave of change and of living down a past era of corrupt patronage, but it has neither the aim nor the means for adopting a complete range of management practices.

In Phase 1, we visited districts where principal selection procedures were being improved technically in one way or another but where the main energies of decision-makers were given over to other challenges and where improved selection was not regarded generally as strategic for maintaining services. In one city, bankruptcy loomed before the board and all but five administrators out of 97 were carrying termination notices. There, the preoccupying aim was to strengthen a coalition between parents and the board as part of an effort to pass a school tax increase. In another district, enrollments were increasing while federal and local revenues declined; there, the board was preoccupied with budget trimming while the superintendent searched for principals who would give strong loyalty during hard times.

Thus boards and superintendents should assign weights to what is most and least important to the larger aims of their districts. One may need politically to be working on every issue that comes up, as well as to be striving to improve school operations, but only a few issues can be given high priority across any two to three year period. Boards should try to break through the superficial crust of importance ascribed verbally to the role of the principal on the one side and the ideology of quality selection of educators on the other. Beneath this crust on the cake of school custom are the varied actual concerns of each district.

Most aims of school boards are not mutually exclusive. Yet, PSP and personnel management appear to be so complicated and taxing as to be aims that do not subordinate readily or fuse smoothly into other aims such as millage votes, retrenchment, curriculum revision, varsity sports competition, union contract relations, and many other vital activity subsystems.

A school district whose board members and administration decide to embark on PSP changes will need to place great importance on this effort, including provision of money as well as authority, if the changes are expected to be real in their consequences. The magnitude of commitment will depend upon how deep the changes are expected to be.

But without a new emphasis on leadership selection and preservation, the changes that take place are likely to be slight and to gradually erode. Here are some suggestions:

1. The first 'universal' feature of a PSP change, therefore, is a board policy appraisal of the *status quo*. Unless there is a majority consensus that current practice must change in substantial ways, PSP change is not worth the fuss it entails. Small technical revisions or partial improvements will tend to be swamped by the weight given to tradition and by the force of other competing concerns.

2. The superintendent and a majority of the board have to aim together toward an outcome that they desire strongly so that PSP changes can be harnessed tangibly to that outcome. In other words, a change in personnel management practice may have intrinsic merit, but it is not apt to be accomplished, given the force of past practices in the lives of staff members, unless its objectives are clarified.

3. A district that wants to select candidates mainly from within its boundaries will advertise vacancies very differently from one seeking to recruit from without, even where both sources remain as permissible. A district that wants to strengthen school-community relations in substantial ways that go beyond increased public satisfaction will build community representation into screening procedures in a deep manner, and so forth. Elaborate forms of administrative team building for the purpose of intensifying the chain of command or increasing accountability will generate procedures that are strong on central office controls over nearly all elements of the process, to the *relative* neglect of community participation. An all-purpose PSP can be designed, to be sure, but when implemented, it will skew toward the enduring aims of the board by the weight of subsequent events. For these reasons, the new PSP should be designed to fit the locale and its policy priorities from the outset.

4. We saw no district in which people at all levels neglected the matter of fairness, no matter how incompletely it may have been realized in practice. A PSP that is believed to lack fairness in the provision of opportunity and in due process is a serious waste of resources and should be replaced.

5. An improved PSP must be taken seriously by the board and superintendent, and it must be implemented in a fair manner to be consequential, but it need *not* be comprehensive or elaborate in the range of its operating features in order to be effective. If administrators, teachers, and parents conclude from its introduction and from the appointment of the first few new principals that a serious and positive change from past procedures is evident, other changes begin to occur. Talents latent in the regular school staff begin to surface and to be contributed in new ways.

6. Successful developments in revising PSPs are most often seen as part of efforts to rebuild or redevelop school systems. Wherever those we interviewed thought they were helping to change community directions, or improve schooling, or build a clear alternative to a pattern of historic failure, PSP changes were taking hold as one facet of the redefined situation.

PSP innovation locally should thus be conceived of as part of community or school system renewal and adaptation. Those larger ends may be pursued over a generation as in

Montgomery County, or over a decade as in Hayward and Howard County. It is not the speed of the change but the quality of confidence about the effort that is significant. Substantial improvements in PSP tend to become self-reinforcing, and the pace of change quickens.

Criteria for PSP Change

Among the procedural elements themselves, several stand out as central to a new efficacy:

1. One of these is the openness of the intake process. Where people believe that *anyone* who meets the widely announced eligibility criteria is really welcome to apply, a first condition of efficacy has been met.

2 Another is that of *preparation*. If eligibility itself or competitive standing as an applicant requires a number of experiences and competencies, the PSP becomes respected to the extent that it provides wide access to voluntary preparation through counseling, training or advanced graduate study, service work, or informal apprenticeships. Able educational leaders look for districts where the starting point is open and the means for becoming a serious contender are available and well charted.

3. Districts succeed with improvements to the extent that their procedures are perceived to be *rigorous*. Hard preparation during training, stiff standards during interviewing, challenging written work, and demanding, even stressful evaluation and feedback, are quite generally regarded as evidence that something of enduring value is taking place. Rigor becomes a public measure of how much seriousness will be accorded the role of the principal; and where the inference is made that the competitive process is stiff, other administrative staff and teachers often rise to the idea that their work will also require more and better productivity.

4. Importance should be ascribed to appointment outcomes. Do people who are eligible and who compete effectively actually get principalships? Are some of them perceptibly *different* from those who used to get appointed? The new emergence of minorities and women can convey this when the procedure appears to be fair, open, preparative, and rigorous, but there are other sources of surprise as well. If nearly all past principals were tall, for example, the advent of short candidates will be deemed to be indicative of change. If all past high school appointments were from the coaching ranks, the appointment of a chemistry teacher will send a strong message.

5. A PSP that comes to be highly valued is one that builds strong interdependence among central office and building administrators. This can be induced in a variety of ways, but its positive significance for the district comes from the changes in trust, candor, and pace of interlevel communication that result. And, as new appointees come to feel fully included in the cooperative network, their readiness to do their best work as leaders intensifies. The previous PSP may have build such a network, of course, but it will be viewed as rewarding cronyism rather than leadership performance.

Clues to Essential PSP Elements

There are some technical elements which appear essential to effective implementation. We cannot state this with solid confidence because our project lacked a national probability sample. In addition, our data are confined to districts with more than 10,000 students, and it may be that what is essential in large settings is not essential elsewhere. There are some clues to what appears to be essential, however, and these are firmer than those based on fewer cases or studies done in less depth. (These clues are summarized in Table 5-1.)

A. *Merit*

1. *Vacancy.* Contrary to the proposition imbedded in many administrative association contracts, defining and posting announcement of a specific vacant principalship is no longer a feasible practice. Every district subverts the practice or gets around it one way or another for reasons presented in Chapter 2.

It is important to acknowledge that school closings, early retirements, the exercise of transfer rights, and budget uncertainties impinge too heavily on systems nowadays to make specific vacancy definitions stable or plannable. Internship programs enable a district to transform instabililty into a treatable challenge. Systems such as Hayward and Montgomery County have a backlog of previously trained and assessed candidates from which to draw at any time in a school year. An independent assessment center such as Howard County's provides a similar resource. Large systems need a backlog of ready candidates.

Every one of the Phase 2 districts fills vacancies from within the ranks of interns or assistant or vice principals whose eligibility and leadership potential have been thoroughly assessed. In essence, they have added new, pre-vacancy stages to their PSPs so that when a vacancy is announced, the qualified candidates are already at the gate. The process of searching is not publicized by the posting of vacancy announcments. It is built into ongoing personnel practices which are themselves widely described and accessible.

2. *Selection Criteria.* It is not only essential to develop and disseminate criterial standards which encompass all of the duties and skills required; it is even more essential to decide in advance what kinds of evidence will be gathered to use in appraising candidates on the basis of the stated criteria. The higher the priority given to a leadership performance criterion, the more difficult it will be to conceive of and collect evidence that bears upon it. If a district emphasizes the ability to lead teachers toward improvements in instruction, for example, paper credentials and group interview responses will tell selectors very little that they need to know.

When the criteria are fitted to a particular vacancy, they achieve their highest level of intrinsic validity. If a particular school hosts a large program in Cambodian bilingual education, the criteria might ideally reflect this fact. Unfortunately, too many changes in assignments lie ahead to make this feasible, and more comprehensively general standards must be developed. A large system will need to examine its array of schools at any one level and build their special requirements into the general set of standards. Where the resulting set becomes too general, however, the generalities detract from the vacancy pool and from screening efforts.

Table 5-1

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPAL SELECTION ELEMENTS

AIMS	VACANCY	SELECTION CRITERIA
Leadership Merit	If no one knows you are searching, no test of merit is possible	Develop a complete set Connect each criterion with a type of evidence Decide whether general or unique to a school
Sex and Race Equity	Women and racial/ethnic minorities depend for their applications upon a vacancy announcement Fair or unfair?	Review of criteria by women and racial/ethnic minorities
Legitimacy	All affected groups are informed	Criteria are made public Criteria are board-approved

APPLICANT POOL	SCREENING	APPOINTMENT
Generate and prepare continuously	Include diverse and divergent screeners	Avoid excuses to defer
Define access clearly	Avoid reliance on interviews	Notification protocol for winners and losers
Keep size large	Evaluate	
State real incentives		
Generate women and racial/ethnic pool continuously	Eliminate sources of bias	Equalize real appointment outcomes
Prove list is used		
Recruit outside district, if necessary		
Use informal networks	Fair or unfair?	Fair?
Leaders of affected groups informed of pool members	Broad representation	Full announcement
	Divergence explained	Full account of process
Nominations taken	Evaluation results disseminated	

As with vacancy announcements, each of the five Phase 2 districts copes with the challenges of selection criteria by recruiting, training and assessing aspirants to the principalship in explictly formal ways for from one to four years prior to selection itself. *This is the dramatic difference between the two phases of our study.* If selection criteria are prepared each time a vacancy occurs, and if applications are taken each time, the validation of qualification and eligibility narrow down to a precious few hours of scanning resumes and making telephone queries. If, on the other hand, aspirants are being trained and appraised continuously, there are abundant data at hand and criteria can be fashioned to pertain to a particular school or for generic openings.

3. *Applicant Pool.* A good PSP is one where generating an adequate pool of candidates is part of the regular business of administering the system locally. It matters little whether the pool is created from inside the district or in other ways. Some districts host highly diversified, large teaching staffs, while others are relatively homogeneous and inbred. In one Phase 1 district, for example, before court-ordered desegregation, 95 percent of the city's 5,000 teachers were whites born and raised in the community, and 80 percent of them were graduates of the same local teachers college. In that instance, an applicant pool had to be developed by recourse to a nationwide recruitment drive. In Hayward, teachers aiming at eventual principalships are attracted into the district from other localities in the San Francisco Bay Area because of news about the internship program.

In an effective PSP, there is heavy pressure on the application gate as large numbers of staff seek to enter the competition. That pressure builds up because a system builds a magnetic reputation for good management; because the route to candidacy is well laid out; because the competition for opportunity is both rigorous and observably efficacious (e.g., those who meet the criteria get appointed); and because there are describable rewards associated with becoming a principal.

4. *Screening.* It is essential to think through, long in advance of any one search for a principal, the answers to this question: *Who will collect and appraise what evidence about candidates?*

The energies of screeners are wasted if they are expended on issues of eligibility. A competent and trustworthy personnel director and staff can do much to set the stage for effective screening by sifting out the ineligibles on the basis of objective standards of certification, length of types of service, and the like. Broward County's resume form offers an example of how much can be accomplished in advance of group screening. Thus, personnel not only narrows the list but contributes a uniform format to the usable evidence.

Assuming these preliminaries have been handled effectively, we can deal with the issue of *who* screens. In his treatise on *Victims of Groupthink*, social psychologist Irving Janis uses the term 'groupthink':

> . . . as a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivations to realistically appraise alternative courses of action... Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures. (p. 9)

Every PSP we studied in both phases gave signs of the effects of 'groupthink.' Only the NASSP Assessment Center operations within Howard County showed serious, concerted efforts to reduce those effects through painstaking checks and balances, and even there th

assessors trained to screen were limited to a small group of district and school administrators. Some Phase 1 and several Phase 2 districts combat 'groupthink' by including parents and teachers on their screening committees. This *does* help to break up the strain toward unanimity common to close-knit groups of senior administrators.

A good PSP balances multiple sources of evidence with multiple sources of assessment. By and large, Phase 2 sites did not accept the proposition that screeners should come from diverse backgrounds or from multiple interest groups. For several, the idea of including board members, parents, or teachers smacked of a return to a past era of politically motivated patronage appointments. For others, the assessment activities seemed to have become too technical to permit of diversity in screening.

Two essentials of the screening process, however, transcend these points of view. One is that those who do the screening should comprise more than a cohesive team of senior administrators because they lose the ability, over time, to correct one another's errors of judgment and tend to strain toward unanimity. A second essential is that without some other participation, screening loses its external credibility. It appears to take place in a way no one can attest to as trustworthy or well executed, except the same team members.

Given well formulated criteria and evidence sufficient to test for their relative fulfillment, a good measure of quality of screening will be the presence of some screeners different enough to countervail the negative effects of 'groupthink.' For instance, several Phase 2 districts placed heavy reliance on the participation of *school-based* as well as district-level administrators and staff on screening and/or interview committees.

Finally, where districts do not use assessment center *simulation* exercises, a great deal of ritualistic activity can build up around screening group interviews. Screeners often come to believe there is much to be learned from how a candidate responds to questions put by members during a 30–45 minute encounter. This is ritualistic because screeners (often working with incomplete evidence of other kinds), in their keen diligence, come to believe that they can differentiate accurately between interviewees and that their combined ratings really do signify something indicative. Most of us have taken part in such a process and we can recollect the emergence of a kind of halo effect from using our judgment and fusing it with others. Candidates who interview well and are later appointed sometimes carry the halo with them. Unsuccessful candidates may question whether the encounter was really indicative of much of anything.

Paper examinations of the kind once used in big cities turned out upon evaluation to fail to discriminate between better and poorer candidates. The personnel director in one Phase 1 district uses an essay test of his own devising as a pre-selection measure, but he scores it himself and has not had it evaluated. So, too, we found no district where the selective validity of screening interviews had been evaluated. The results of screening ideally should never rest entirely upon the ratings members make based on brief interviews. Rather, additional evidence should be taken into account.

5. *Appointment Decisions.* Superintendents participate heavily in the PSP, and they nearly always abide by the nominations produced by the screening committee. These are 'given' properties essential to the imputed consistency, importance, and integrity of the local process. The internship methods in Hayward and Montgomery County enable superintendents there to test their choices over time and to revise them as evidence of performance accumulates.

What is as common as a superintendent's full and responsive participation, however, is the practice of letting other considerations divert the appointment itself. The decision to appoint the top ranked candidate is sometimes *deferred* in order to accommodate a rash of transfers. Someone who has given long and loyal service suffers burnout and is brought into headquarters in July, displacing the director of secondary education, who is then sent into the principalship. The top ranked candidate from the June screening then becomes an assistant principal awaiting an opportunity. Last minute changes are particularly likely to reflect some strong bond of sentiment or long association which gets factored in by the superintendent or his key deputies. What gets lost is the culminating placement of the ablest leader in the most suitable position. In part, this is a byproduct of unstable conditions in public education, as these overcomplicate the superintendent's efforts to plan well. In part, those conditions offer a rationalization for 'settling out' and ending up with less than highest quality leadership.

Conservation of merit depends, too, on the observance of a protocol of communication with the winners and losers. Appointees need to hear privately from the superintendent and to have a chance to bring up concerns or to define their expectations before anything becomes public. Losers need similar exchanges and expressions of appreciation or guidance on future prospects.

B. Sex and Racial Equity

In addition to the issue of fairness, there seem to be eight other essential elements of a good PSP if a system's aim is to do more than pursue merit and is to include sex and racial/ethnic equity as well. The concept of equity includes fairness; today, it goes beyond this standard and beyond even provision of opportunity to include the standard of *representativeness*. We do not mean this in terms of statistical balance but in terms of demonstrating that educational leadership of highest merit comes from all segments of the population. Representativeness today presupposes the presence and the successful implementation of affirmative action goals by local officials.

1. Women and minorities lack the informal channels of access to information shared by most white men. Therefore, the issuance of vacancy announcements helps to offset a built-in disadvantage. Better yet, a training and internship process which welcomes women and minority candidates offsets this lack of access.

2. Selection criteria should be reviewed and critiqued periodically by women and minority educators as a means of eliminating barriers and disadvantaging formulations which may be developed in good faith by white administrators who lack adequate awareness of their tacit features. So, too, there may be some criteria that should be included because they pertain to a leadership position even if their inclusion gives some small advantage to otherwise disadvantaged applicants from the ranks of women and minorities. Sexual and racial neutrality are not essential in all critical features. It is here that the interplay between merit and equity deserves the most thoughtful review.

3. In order to appoint women and minority leaders of merit, an especially substantial pool of applicants must be generated and maintained. Many Phase I districts used the practice of having *token* candidates who were women or black, and all affected parties knew this was taking place.

4. There must be evidence that the pool is used – that campaigning to get into the pool has positive consequences for women and minorities.

5. A district which has neglected women and minority educators over many decades cannot expect to recruit solely from within. It will have to reach aggressively to the outside and change its teacher force composition as well as its pool of principals-to-be.

6. If a district embarks on generating a substantial pool, it will need to rely on networks of information and access other than those it used in the past. Women, black, and other minority candidates will communicate through networks of their own devising if there is news of a district which has actually *determined* to act affirmatively within a framework of merit selections.

7. Screening groups *devoid* of women and minority members make realization of equity much more difficult. Similarly, the types of evidence gathered to test for fitness to the criteria should be reviewed for bias and for deliberate inclusion of some point *for* special status. These should be performance-based, not attributes of sex or race, of course.

8. Above all, the appointment of women and minority candidates of observably high merit comprises the touchstone of equity success. As the pace of good appointments picks up and comes to include high school principalships, the pool of applicants will expand.

C. *Legitimacy*

Underlying all facets of public leadership selection is the importance of legitimacy or credibility. Teachers and parents will increase their confidence in the system and will *follow* the lead of principals to the extent that they interpret the PSP as operating with integrity and on the basis of merit. The legitimacy accorded to newly appointed principals calls not only for the other essential elements discussed above, but for its own ten ingredients, as follows:

1. All affected parties – staff and board and parents – must be fully informed about vacancies and procedures.

2. Selection criteria should be made public and explained each time they are going to be used. Particular care should be taken to ensure that candidates understand exactly what is expected.

3. Those criteria should be examined, revised or approved by the board in public session.

4. Teachers and other staff representatives and parent leaders should be informed periodically about the nature and membership (not necessarily by name) of the candidate pool.

5. There should be a means through which staff and taxpayers may *nominate* candidates after eligibility standards are announced. This element contains a serious paradox which limits its universality, however. If nominations have been a source of special interest influence in the past, or if a district has developed careful and rigorous processes

through which aspirants become candidates by virtue of inservice training and internship-type preparation, then an open nomination element may *reduce* confidence in the legitimacy of the PSP. Use of nominations also must be done in a way that safeguards against the fiction that a nominee is in some way preferable to an applicant because influential persons have done the nominating. The legitimacy of a PSP depends on widespread public understanding of the ways in which aspirants can become candidates. If those ways are open and observably fair, a nominating element is itself not essential and may even contain perverse effects.

6. Broad representation on screening groups of teachers and parents as well as administrators and supervisors enables greater legitimation of the selection process, as the reasonableness, fairness, and integrity of the process can be witnessed by relevant affected parties. This is especially the case where long periods of training and internship are absent and screening must proceed from limited information. If membership becomes a matter of interest group politics – a risk entailed as representation broadens – then merit and equity aims may suffer. Therefore, even with regard to the quest for legitimacy, local conditions should guide the composing of screening and rating groups. If their composition is invariably limited to the same few senior administrators, a loss in legitimacy will occur over time.

7. Administrators should make a public disclosure on the subject of how *divergent* judgments will be factored into the screening and rating process. Stated more bluntly, who will take part who is not a regular member of the superintendent's cabinet or inner circle? Do those persons have expertise and standing sufficient to offset their non-membership? If sex and racial equity issues are present, legitimacy will increase as women and minority participation is increased.

8. The legitimacy of claims about the ability of screeners and raters to make meritorious judgments requires independent evaluation. How will the public learn whether an improved PSP has been consequential? In other words, when the apointment decisions are assessed in terms of outcome effects on school achievement, service delivery, and community relations, the assessment should extend back to include screening decisions.

9. The superintendent's office should publicize the action of appointing principals, stressing the qualifications of the appointee and indicating fit to assignment. Legitimacy increases as staff and parents see that the appointment has importance and was approached with special care.

10. Similarly, the system should make an annual public report on how the PSP has operated, who has taken part, and what its relation to merit and equity aims has been. In this way, the strategic value of effective PSP efforts will gain in public understanding. This need not be a separate report, of course, but the process features and their improvement should be explained annually.

A Note on Efficiency

The standard of efficiency has to do with gauging the extent to which a PSP yields outcomes commensurate with the efforts entailed in its operation. Neither a systems

analytical nor a time management study approach is appropriate here because of the great variety of aims that may be pursued through or in conjunction with the PSP. Nonetheless, every district board member, superintendent, and personnel officer interviewed communicated some concerns with efficiency. Here are a few suggestions for testing and for protecting against obvious sources of inefficiency:

1. The overall time invested in PSP by all participants in a district is worth estimating and pricing. How much more or less should be expended in order to achieve merit-based, equitable, and legitimate leadership appointments may then be considered in a practical fashion.

2. Assessment center procedures are expensive, but their efficiency in producing strongly competent principals may outweigh the costs entailed in long-term ways. Efficiency should therefore be considered in line with the desired level of leadership performance.

3. Those parts of a local PSP which play no clear part in selecting the best available principals should be identified, challenged, and subjected to school board review. Tests which do not predict performance, screening group operations which are time-consuming yet do not discriminate pertinently, and candidate pool forming activities that fail to generate promising candidates in desired numbers, deserve to be questioned and discarded.

Operating Difficulties

Just as there are some rather universal conditions surrounding and threading through good PSP development, so too all of the procedures studied share a number of severe difficulties which never get fully resolved. Most of these stem from the limitations in available knowledge from which to make better procedural designs.

For example, districts share the problem of basing selective judgment on pertinent evidence. What can be learned from written essays? What weight should be given to records from a personnel file? From a university transcript? From interviews by screening committee members? This is the nexus of the problem being addressed by assessment centers, of course, where serious efforts are being made to replace credentials and testimonial data with exercises which *simulate* leadership in action and which are amenable to observation and rating. It will take some years before the real relation between ratings of performance under simulation and performance on the job can be established.

The quality of the evidence about educational leadership goes up as the evidence approximates most closely the actual performance conditions and functions of the principal. Phase 2 districts differed most tellingly from Phase 1 districts on this dimension. The Phase 2 districts were more exemplary because their PSPs made much fuller use of performance-linked evidence, gathered over a longer period of time.

Districts that emphasize internships, for instance, do so in large part in order to obtain performance-based evidence. This is not the same as evidence gained informally and in retrospect on teachers who have been 'in the pipeline' for years as potential leaders, nor is it the same as reports on the performance of candidates already in lesser positions or in

principalships in other districts. Even the Phase 2 districts, however, seem to give more weight to screening committee interviews (even where these last only 30–40 minutes) than the logic of evidence would suggest as offering predictive validity. The weight screeners tend to ascribe to their interviews probably exceeds the power of prediction that can be gained under the best of circumstances.

A second source of technical difficulty that comes up from a weak knowledge base is the problem of educational as contrasted with administrative ability assessment. All of the Phase 2 districts exhibited the ability to seek out, trace, and make judgments about administrative abilities. The strongest features of all the PSPs we studied, moreover, were those derived from the profession of personnel management. Those features do not illuminate the mysteries of curriculum and instructional supervision. That Phase 2 districts place genuine and widespread emphasis on instruction was evident from verbal assertions and from examination of the credentials of new appointees. Nevertheless, all district PSPs seem to us to display some uncertainty about how to appraise knowledge and performance skills in curriculum and instructional leadership.

A third difficulty stems from an uncertainty over counseling those who remain in the district but lose in the competitive selection process. This came up in every instance from all candidates, successful and failed. There appears to be some lack of general readiness to follow through completely in a way that will help people reconcile their experience and regroup either to move away from leadership aspirations or to try again. The effect can be the unwanted if unintended generation of alienation from management. The more competitive the selection process, by the way, the more necessary a program of counseling becomes. (Assessment centers probably offer the best solution to this difficulty.)

Some Benefits and Costs

Improving PSPs seems to be a beneficial strategy for improving educational practices. Several Phase 1 districts gave evidence of earnest efforts to make improvements in one or two aspects of their selection procedures, so that while they had not yet gone far enough to fully countervail local customs of cronyism and reliance on vague notions of 'fit,' they did express a new importance being attached to PSP. In Phase 2, the same deep effects were visible.

District leaders are capable of reaching out for new knowledge and for technical assistance. When a change is well enough mandated – when the policy aim is clear and the superintendent wants to reform the procedure badly enough – the techniques are within reach. The greatest initial benefit comes to the line administrators at headquarters and in the school sites. They are revived, alert, and inspirited, although some who lack competence are made very anxious by the change.

Benefits also accrue to parent leaders and to board members if their constituents are clamoring for school improvements. Where these two groups have built a coalition, it can be strengthened by evidence of a better focused, fairer, and more earnestly competitive process. Teachers are *least* directly affected because of severe difficulties facing them today in the form of reduced mobility, reductions in force, and a diffuse sense of professional

malaise. Many districts, including the most exemplary, do not go very far toward building teachers deeply into the reformative process, however, and those who do so may find this helps to reduce alienation.

This study did not focus on outcomes for students. Readers will have to await evaluation research being conducted by the Florida Council on Educational Management and by NASSP on its Assessment Center before concluding authoritatively that deep changes in a district's PSP produce deep gains in achievement, student satisfaction, curricular scope, and school-community relations. Everything learned in this study verged on support for this hypothesis, however.

The costs associated with these benefits seem to break into two parts. One is that leadership expectations are unmistakably raised during a period when they may then go unmet or, worse yet, be met and then broken. Those being chosen with the greatest care are best suited to do well as leaders. They are *not* maintainers of the *status quo*. They may not, in the long term, even do as well as others at the task of reducing instructional programs, cutting back other services, and 'making do' with declining resources. A new PSP can achieve economies by reducing deadwood and heightening efficiency, but it raises the distinct possibility of building a very strong administrative cadre of leaders who share high standards in an era of decline.

Similarly, new PSPs can change the very foundations of school districts. There are vital historical continuities which are usually preserved, to be sure, but the pace of change toward an increasingly different future is intensified. Student achievement may rise while varsity championships may grow scarce. A once-rural community in process of suburbanizing will find that process speeded up. The change in leadership cannot truly outpace all other rates of change or constancy that work on a district, yet the leadership effect is profound enough to leverage many events. Therefore, a district embarking on the design of a new PSP ought to consider in advance just how much positive change and challenge it really wants. The adoption of deep changes in PSPs is not one of those fads which will wash through a community and leave no change.

Phase 2 PSPs are, as types, significantly more expensive than those studied in Phase 1. Some of the extra costs are obvious to the reader of the Chapter 4 sections on Montgomery and Howard Counties, for they are attached to the special training, retreats, simulation exercises, testing, and record building inherent in these PSPs. Other extra costs are less tangible and are due to the time and effort, both paid and voluntary, expended in participation. Taking all the districts together, there are wealthy districts that spend little and poor districts that spend a lot. What is more, a poorly designed PSP can take a lot of costly time to operate, with unjustifiable yields.

There is no answer to the question of whether small, partial, and incremental changes in a district's PSP will result in observable benefits. The Phase 2 districts have embraced PSP changes in a very comprehensive sense. The Phase 1 districts include some where small changes have been introduced in recent years without modifying overall results very substantially. A continuum of changes probably exists, ranging from a zero to the sum of all parts. Moderate, partial changes which center on instructional leadership and increased equity may well induce more comprehensive changes. Phase 2 experience is counterintuitive, however. It shows how adoption of very comprehensive changes in PSP has been the preferred approach of some districts.

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Appendix A

ADDITIONAL REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

Available from the National Institute of Education

1. *Selecting American School Principals: Research Report.* D. Catherine Baltzell and Robert A. Dentler, January 31, 1983.

2. *Selecting American School Principals: Executive Summary.* D. Catherine Baltzell and Robert A. Dentler, January 31, 1983.

Available from Abt Associates Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138

3. *School Principal Selection Practices: Five Case Studies.* D. Catherine Baltzell and Robert A. Dentler, 1982.

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